

## MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH

### The role of education in transitions to womanhood the case of the Gambia

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# The Role of Education in Transitions to Womanhood: The Case of The Gambia

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requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy.

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Coventry University

# Abstract

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Girls' enrolment in formal schooling in sub-Saharan Africa has significantly increased and this has started to reduce gender disparity. By being enrolled within the education system, more and more girls are spending their childhood and experiencing their transitions to adulthood while at school. As a consequence, this research argues that girls are having to negotiate between conflicting notions of education in addition to social and cultural expectations of womanhood. This research aims to critically evaluate the impact of education on the transitions to womanhood using The Gambia as a case study. This thesis explores how different educational achievements affect the complex and fluid notion of transitions to adulthood.

The research utilises a qualitative approach to assess the impact of education on the transitions to womanhood in The Gambia. With a strong commitment to education the conventional transitions to womanhood of marriage and childbearing are competing with the more male dominated arena of work. The research groups included participants in school, dropped out of school and some who had never been to school. The participants narrated their perceptions and experiences of education, domestic roles, work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation ceremonies, marriage and childbearing. Narratives were also undertaken with some mothers to compare and contrast the experiences of transitions to womanhood with the introduction of education.

Results illustrate how education can make a difference in some aspects of the transitions, including formal work opportunities and age of marriage but not in others. In a few transitions, cultural attitudes override education and there are still social pressures placed upon girls. However, the results also show how education creates challenges to transitions, including school increases the chance of girls being sexually exploited and how the quality of education creates problems for employment opportunities.

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# Abbreviations

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AAT	Association of Accountant Technicians
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APGWA	Association for Promoting Girls and Women Advancement
BAFROW	The Foundation for Research on Women's Health, Productivity The Environment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRR	Central River Region
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DOS	Dropped Out of School
DOSBSE	Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education
DOSE	Department of State for Education
DOYS	Department of Youth and Sports
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FAWEGAM	Forum of African Women Educationalist The Gambia
GAMCOTRAP	Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices
GFPA	Gambia Family Planning Association
GFSI	Girls Friendly School Initiative
GOTG	Government of The Gambia
GTTI	Gambia Technical Training Institute
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LBS	Lower Basic School
LRR	Lower River Region
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MDI	Management Development Institute
MYWO	Maendelo Ya Wanawake Organization
NBR	North Bank Region
NBS	Never Been to School
NGO	Non Government Organization
NWYC	New World Youth Centre
PEGEP	Presidents Empowerment of Girls Education Project
POP/FLE	Population and Family Life Education
PR	Participatory Research
RDI	Rural Development Institute
RIFT	Remedial Initiative for Female Teacher
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



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UNFPA	United Nations Funds for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Funds
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
URR	Upper River Region
VSO	Volunteer Service Organization
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
WR	Western Region
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

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The overall aim of the research is to critically evaluate the impact of education on the transitions to adulthood in sub-Saharan Africa. How education has affected these transitions, in particular for girls in sub-Saharan Africa, will be explored using The Gambia as a case study. To achieve this aim a number of key objectives will provide the structure. The objectives are to:

1. Analyse the dynamic and fluid nature of the transitions from girlhood to womanhood, focusing on a sub-Saharan African context.
2. Critically examine and explore the impact of education upon the social and cultural transitions to womanhood in sub-Saharan Africa with particular reference to The Gambia.

### Origins of the Study

This research contributes to an ongoing discussion about the lives and experiences of young people in sub-Saharan Africa (Ansell, 2005: 8; Chant & Jones, 2005: 185; Van Blerk, 2008: 248). It makes a contribution, in particular, to the relative importance of education in a sub-Saharan African context (Ansell, 2004: 183; Jones & Chant, 2009: 185). This thesis will contribute to knowledge by exploring how education impacts upon the complex nature of various transitions to adulthood. A gendered approach to the research was adopted because education, in particular, girls' schooling is at the forefront of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has been actively promoted by the Gambian state and international and national organisation programmes throughout the country.

To help achieve the objectives of the study it is important to recognise the role of childhood. Childhood is now recognised as not being a universal experience. Approaches to childhood have explored Western notions and 'other' notions of childhood (Valentine, 2003: 37; Kesby *et al*, 2006: 186). These approaches include social, cultural, development psychology and legal. These have been used to define childhood but these approaches also influence how and when the transitions to

adulthood occur. The incidence of various childhoods and how they are lived and experienced, affect young people's transitions to adulthood. One component of the Western notions of childhood is the importance of education. The model of schooling is geared to the production of a Western model of childhood and is deemed every child's right within in the UNCRC (Burman, 2008).

The path to adulthood is a complex set of transitions that young people learn to navigate. Education affects these transitions making them no longer static and linear but fluid and multifaceted. How these transitions are structured is partly attributed to childhood experiences, including their experiences of education. Concepts and experiences of childhood are changing partly because of education (Ansell, 2005). However, not all of these changes are positive and education has presented challenges to the conventional transitions to adulthood. Young people are constantly negotiating the transitions they go through towards adulthood and education can help inform these decisions.

Childhood is legally defined by the UNCRC as a period up to 18 years old, yet the literature suggests that the upper age limit can be fluid as young people move through various transitions at different times of their lives. For example, in some sub-Saharan African countries womanhood is associated with menarche and/or marriage which can occur as young as 12 years old (Robson, 1996). In Western societies, the lengthening of education to university level has meant some young people choose not to leave home; a transition which is often associated with adulthood in the West (Dores Guerreiro & Abrantes, 2004).

Childhood experiences for girls are thoroughly gendered and as such girls are regarded as incipient women and thus as future wives and mothers (Burman, 2008). Girls are often gendered by their social and cultural roles and through the informal education they receive at home, these roles are deemed appropriate for womanhood. Girls and boys experience transitions to adulthood very differently and the period of youth is a time when gender role differentials intensify (Ansell, 2005). Many studies have simply focused on marriage and childbearing transitions for girls, particularly in a developing world context. However, with more girls being enrolled in schools, work and other assumed adult roles, which have previously been regarded only for boys and men, are becoming more open to young women.

This thesis will explore six interconnected transitions including domestic roles and responsibilities, work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour,

initiation ceremonies, marriage and childbearing. These transitions are both public and private transitions that young people progress through on their path to adulthood. The transitions focus upon the productive, including domestic roles and work, and the reproductive, including marriage and childbearing, spheres of young people's lives. The complexity and interconnectedness of these six transitions will be examined in relation to education.

### **Justifying The Gambia as a Case Study**

The Gambia was chosen as the case study for this research as it is striving to achieve the MDG for universal primary education and to reduce gender disparity (UNDP, 2003). There is limited data on the country and research is often biased in favour of government, NGO and international organisations. The government of The Gambia has a strong commitment to education and in particular girls' education. There have been numerous national campaigns targeting the importance of educating girls and there are a number of scholarship programmes to help girls' further enrolment to secondary education (DOSBSE, 2008). There is a strong sense of culture and tradition among the numerous ethnic groups, with girls education often contradicting and conflicting with the values and roles placed on girls and women in these cultures. It is therefore an interesting case study of research due to The Gambia's progress with education contrasting with the country's cultural traditions.

### **The Participants and the Methods**

The research approach was qualitative in nature and used a range of techniques including interviews, focus group discussions, narratives and task-based activities. Focus groups allow for a wide range of topics to be explored before exploring individual participants' experiences of the lives through narratives. The study was orientated around a child-centred approach, as the researcher required the voices of the participants to be heard. This made the participants subjects of research rather than objects. A number of interviews were undertaken with key informants to discuss education, social and cultural practices, national programmes and policies, responses to the policies and collective views of organisations. The research was undertaken with participants from three cohorts including those in school, those dropped out of school and those who had never been to school. Their ages ranged from 13 to 25 years old. This age range was chosen because some transitions would

already have taken place amongst this age group. Furthermore, the wide age range of the research sample facilitated the examination of transitions that have already occurred and how the participants experienced these transitions. Other research participants included mothers of some of the respondents; this was to compare how some of the transitions have changed over time.

## **Thesis Outline**

This thesis is arranged into a further six chapters. Chapter two consists of a literature review, providing a contextual background to frame the empirical chapters. Firstly, approaches to childhoods will be explored; relating this information into Western and ‘other’ experiences of childhoods. The chapter will then examine the notion of the transitions, including how transitions are multifaceted and are a series of boundaries that young people cross at various points in their lives (Valentine, 2003). Education in sub-Saharan Africa will then be put into context, taking into account how education impacts upon the transitions. The chapter will then introduce the six transitions. The six transitions explored include domestic roles and responsibilities, work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation ceremonies, marriage and childbearing.

Chapter three puts into context the importance of The Gambia as the research study site. The chapter will put into context notions of chapter one which are relevant to The Gambia. Firstly, The Gambia’s education system will be examined, including the various levels of education, girls’ enrolment, the challenges to education and the strategies to alleviate them. The chapter will then examine the six transitions and the affects of education on each of them.

The subsequent chapter is concerned with the research methodology. Chapter four will present the research approach adopted which is child-centred, before exploring the reasons as to why this approach as important to the study. The chapter will then provide a detailed account of the research process, which involved four stages. The numbers involved in the research and the methods that were utilised are analysed. An explanation of how the research was carried out with each participant group will be explored. Issues of ethics and positionality will be examined before finally providing an account of how the data was analysed and the limitations of the research.

Chapter five is the first of two chapters dedicated to the analysis of the empirical research. This chapter will examine the results in relation to participants' attitudes and experiences of education, domestic roles and responsibilities and work. Issues of participants' perceptions of education, their multiple burdens and working for the family will all be analysed. The chapter will examine and analyse the productive and public domains of young people's transitions in relation to their educational level.

Chapter six will critically assess the results concerning the social and reproductive aspects of womanhood including attitudes and practices of their sexual knowledge and behaviour, initiation ceremonies, marriage and childbearing. The chapter will cover issues of sexual exploitation, female circumcision, restructuring the practice, early and forced marriage and schoolgirl pregnancy. These will be examined in relation to participants' education status.

Finally, chapter seven concludes the thesis by summarising the main research findings. The key findings of the research will be discussed and will be provided by evidence from the literature and the research results. The research methods used in the research will be commented upon in relation to whether they were successful. Finally, suggestions for further study will be commented upon.



## Chapter Two

# Education and The Complex Transitions to Adulthood

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### Introduction

The transition to adulthood is a significant stage in the life course during which young people<sup>1</sup> leave childhood behind and take on assumed adult roles and responsibilities. Young people in the developing world are experiencing changes in their paths to adulthood, largely due to education. This chapter will first explore how childhood experiences have an impact on the timing and sequencing of transitions to adulthood. The chapter will then explore the notion of transitions and the gender differences in the path to adulthood. The following section will focus on education in a developing world context. This will justify why education is the focus of this study. The chapter will then examine the transitions towards adulthood, namely domestic roles and responsibilities, work, initiation, marriage and childbearing. For each transition the impact of education will be explored.

### Approaches to Childhood

Childhood is a state in the human developmental process ending with adulthood. At its simplest, childhood is understood as the early life phase of all people in all societies. It is characterised by rapid physiological and psychological development and represents the beginning of the process of maturation to adulthood (James & James, 2008). There are numerous variables that influence how young people learn and how their lives are shaped: these include their social class, ethnicity, race, gender, culture and social policy. How adult status is achieved varies and changes across all societies: it can be defined biologically by physical growth; sexual maturity; and the capacity to reproduce. Socially it can be defined by economic independence; marriage; initiation and legally by chronological age; and psychologically as a quality of maturity (Butterworth & Harris, 1994).

There have been a number of approaches to exploring childhood, including social, cultural, development psychology and legal. How childhood is experienced can

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis refers to young people, which includes children defined legally as under 18 years, by the UNCRC. However, as not all children become adults at 18 years this thesis uses the term young people.

affect the transitions to adulthood. The emerging paradigm of childhood studies recognises that 'childhood' is a socially constructed concept (Evans, 2006). The social approach emphasises the diversity of ways that childhood is constituted, experienced and the interactions people have with one another and the environments in which they live (James & James, 2008). A social construction concentrates around the ways of exploring how young people learn to become members of the society in which they live (Kehily, 2004). This approach accounts for not only the differences in different parts of the world but also differences between and within societies. James & James (2008) define the social construction approach as exploring "the ways in which individuals are involved in the ongoing 'making' of everyday life through their actions" (James & James, 2008: 122). There are marked roles and responsibilities that young people should adhere to which are placed upon them by adults. This approach explores young people's identity based on performance rather than biological age; children can grow in terms of how they are regarded by others (Valentine, 2003). The social construct of childhood acknowledges the different ways that young people are treated and their capabilities and competence are socially constructed.

Cultural approaches have explored religion, cultural traditions, family expectations and gender structures in how different communities around the world raise young people and prepare them for adulthood (Saraswathi, 2003). Anthropologists have long understood that different cultures have different ways of raising young people and have different ways in constructing what they mean by childhood (Blitzer, 1991). This avoids imposing Western ideas of childhood on other cultures with different understandings of children. Evidence from societies in different parts of the world reveals a wide range of attitudes towards young people and expectations of what young people can and cannot do (James & James, 2008). The notions of childhood and adulthood carry different meanings for members of different socio-cultural communities across the globe; therefore the experience at each of these stages of life takes on different forms across different cultures (Goosens, 2006). Many African societies have a set of gendered child rearing beliefs and practices that are derived from cultural traditions and based within that culture regarding what is natural, normal and necessary in raising a child to adulthood (Adegoke, 2001).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century developmental psychology became established as the dominant paradigm for studying young people in the West. The developmental psychology approach documents the stages and transitions of Western childhood.

Within this framework, childhood is seen as an apprenticeship for adulthood that can be charted through a linear progression of stages relating to chronological age, physical and moral development and cognitive ability (Kehily, 2004: 7; James & James, 2008: 46). The achievement at each stage of the linear progression is therefore necessary before moving on to the next stage. Piaget became one of the leading authorities on this approach. Central to his theory was that young people's inherent lack of skills and their achievement in learning these skills is linked to specific defined ages (James & James, 2008). Developmental psychologists are interested in behaviour that comes with age and are interested in whether children are qualitatively different from adults or simply lack their experience (Bryant & Colman, 1995). However, there is increasing unease within the approach that it fails to understand the impact of social and cultural contexts upon the development of children (James & James, 2008).

A legal approach uses biological age to distinguish childhood from adulthood as young people are assumed to share a commonality because of their age. The UN uses the following terms: child (1-17 years); adolescent (10-19 years); teenager (13-19 years); young adult (20-24 years); and youth (15-24 years) (Ansell, 2005). Biological age has been used to chart children's physical, psychological and social development, but age may bear little relationship to the expectations and experiences that people have of young people (James & James, 2008). The youth period is often used to define the period between being a child and becoming an adult. James and James (2008) define youth as a young person who is too old to be regarded socially as a child but who is not yet legally an adult. Classifications of childhood and youth are often strategic and contested. Labels such as child soldier, teenage mother and youth violence are socially meaningful and may shift according to socio-political circumstances (Bucholtz, 2002). Labels like those previously mentioned are used to depict images of young people in contested ways to Western expectations and experiences of young people. As discussed the researcher is going to use the term young people throughout this thesis because the research participants overlapped the UN definitions of childhood stages. For the thesis the researcher is using the term young people to define the age group below the ages of 25 years.

A consequence of placing such a strong emphasis on age as a determinant is that it adopts a too uniform definition of childhood. A legal approach has been established to protect young people, for example by the United Nations Convention

on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both declarations defines a child as every human being below 18 years of age. Yet this clearly problematic as children do not suddenly become adults at 18 in all societies, nor are they necessarily treated as children up to that age. In legal terms age matters as it is used to define some of the responsibilities of adulthood. For example, it determines access to, and prohibition from, for example, work, sex, alcohol and entry to the armed forces (Burman, 2008). There has been some criticism that the ‘universal’ models of childhood employed by international organisations are actually based on idealised Western norms and often obscure rather than reveal childhoods in the developing world (Kesby *et al*, 2006: 186; Wyness, 2006: 75).

There is an increasing recognition that the image of childhood is largely a social and cultural construction and understandings of this phase is not the same everywhere. Culture, is in part, determined by society causing these two approaches to support each other. This thesis will therefore use a combination of a socio-cultural approach towards childhood. There is a huge diversity in the lives of young people in terms of what they experience around the world as well as within any society. Adopting a socio-cultural approach would seem to be appropriate when exploring the experiences and expectations of young people in given cultures within particular societies. The view that childhood is determined by biological age, physiological and psychological frameworks is clear in international legislation, this thesis will contribute to academic knowledge by using a socio-cultural approach to examine the lives and experiences of young people in The Gambia.

### ***Universal, Western Childhoods or ‘Other’ Childhoods***

In the academic arena approaches to childhood studies have previously been dominated by Western images of childhood as a ‘universal’ norm (Jenks, 2005: 123; Kesby *et al*, 2006: 186). However, over the past few years an additional category of childhood has emerged called ‘other’ childhoods (Valentine, 2003). These ‘other’ childhoods show the diversity of children’s lives and experiences in the non-Western world, including the developing world. Focusing on the Western notion, childhood is conceived as a time of innocence and freedom from the responsibilities of adulthood but highly circumscribed by education. This view is often defined as the ‘correct

childhood' against which the UNCRC, the work of charitable agencies and international bodies, measure all other childhoods in the world (Jenks, 2005).

Kehily (2007) argues childhood is not universal and is a product of culture, while Matthews and Limb (1999) emphasise the need to recognise the importance of 'multiple childhoods'. The model of childhood which emerged in the West bears little relation to the reality of young people's lives, or to attitudes toward childhood in many developing world cultures. Yet official policy continues to be based on a model of childhood in which children go to school, are healthy and are protected from exploitation. 'Other' childhoods in the developing world can be difficult to visualise except in terms of what they 'lack' compared to the idealised norms of the West (Kesby *et al*, 2006). Factors such as poverty, disability, children affected by AIDS, ill health, being orphaned, taking care of family members, being child-heads of households, being a street child and engaging in armed conflict are the images of 'other' childhoods. Robson (2004) has done much to critique the universal models of childhood, illustrating just how different the lives of young people in Zimbabwe are from idealised norms. Child-headed households, who are primary care givers for other young people, were studied. Being young carers challenges the 'universal' image on the rights of young people to grow up free from the burden of work, care and responsibilities. Young people working as carers are thought to have a lost childhood and a loss of innocence because of their extra responsibilities (Robson, 2004).

Rather than perceiving developing world children as having abnormal childhoods it should be remembered that Western children tend to experience more privileged protected childhoods compared to those in the developing world (Punch, 2003). Burman (2008) argues that the globalisation of Western notions of childhood penalise poorer young people in the developing world and Western notions represents an ideal that young people in the developing world cannot, and never will be, able to fulfil. It is more useful to accept there is a great deal of diversity in how childhood is constituted between and within societies and it is influenced, no less than adulthood, by the differences of social status and culture (Prout, 2005). How childhood is experienced affects the transitions to adulthood.

### **The Notion of Transitions to Adulthood**

The activities young people engage in during childhood are regarded as behaviours while 'waiting' or 'preparing' for adulthood (Blitzer, 1991). While

childhood is essential as a preparation for adult life, it is adult life that is important (James *et al*, 1998). Adulthood is a set of culturally, historically and gender specific activities, rights and responsibilities young people acquire over a period by means of a process of transition (Lloyd & Jessor, 2005). Wyn and White (1997) for example, have acknowledged that the term ‘transition to adulthood’ draws on the idea that young people make one transition to adulthood and that adulthood is a clearly defined status. However, there is not a single point at which a young person moves from a status of having no adult roles or rights to full adulthood; thus making the transitions complex and fluid. There is an emerging body of work recognising transitions to adulthood as a series of boundaries young people cross at varying points rather than a fixed stage (Valentine, 2003: 48; Van Blerk, 2008: 245).

The period of ‘youth’<sup>2</sup>, as a period of preparation for adulthood, is undergoing change in the sense that many young people spend far longer periods in the transition from youth to adulthood (Valentine, 2003: 38; Goossens, 2006: 2). It is a period of social, psychological, economic and biological transitions and, for many young people, it involves demanding emotional challenges and important choices (Lloyd & Jessor, 2005). A young person’s life course trajectory towards adulthood often involves negotiating and navigating a range of transitional strands: education, work, training, parental home, sex, relationships and family (Hopkins, 2006). Across Western countries, youth is prolonged as education and training are lengthened and the gap between childhood and marriage and childbearing has extended (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002: 515; Ammans & Kelly, 2008: 72).

The emergent literature shows that in the developing world the issues of what youth is and what it implies to become an adult, do not become any less complex (Langevang, 2008). In the developing world, as elsewhere, young people come across the fluid boundaries between time and place-specific notions of childhood, youth and adulthood (Langevang, 2008). Valentine (2003) emphasises the need to explore what it means to be young in the developing world and how the ‘boundary crossings’ from youth to adulthood are defined and experienced by young people. Studies of young people’s transition to adulthood have documented how their routes from childhood into adulthood are becoming increasingly diversified and uncertain and are more

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<sup>2</sup> The period of youth uses the UN definition and includes those aged 15-24 years.

contested than in any previous time (Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004: 131; Langevang, 2008: 2040).

### **Gendered Transitions**

Transitions to adulthood are inescapably gendered: they are about becoming a man or a woman rather than simply becoming an adult (Kehily *et al*, 2007). Girls have historically experienced the transition to adulthood very differently from boys. Social and cultural notions of childhood vary; childhood often ends sooner for girls than for boys (Ansell, 2005). Girls' transition to woman status is often at marriage; they therefore tend to have shorter childhoods (Robson, 1996). Womanhood is strongly gendered around the conception and bearing of children and marriage. Womanhood status is thus depicted as being achieved through a relationship with another, either a man or child; but not through the masculine path of career building (Robson, 1996: 405; Macleod, 2003: 430).

Gender role differentials have generally led to an increasingly sharp differentiation of roles, behaviours and expectations, beginning at the time boys and girls experience puberty and continuing through to their adult roles (Lloyd & Jessor, 2005). During the youth period, young men's and women's transitions increasingly experience the diversity of societal gender norms and expectations. On reaching adulthood, skills, responsibilities and gender specific activities that have been learnt in childhood are finally put to use.

In sub-Saharan Africa young people usually enter adulthood having experienced differences in duration and content of schooling and having taken up different work roles in the home and workplace. When exactly these transitions occur varies by age, gender and culture. The following section will put into context education in the developing world before exploring how schooling affects the transitions.

### **Education in the Developing World**

There is a tendency in the Western world to assume that school is the natural and inevitable setting for a young person's education. Whilst education might be thought of in terms of learning and developing skills in more formal situations, the historical and global contexts of childhood indicates education goes way beyond a modern Western conception of schooling (Wyness, 2006). Young people from

developing countries are likely to be socialised and educated outside of any system of formal schooling (Wyness, 2006). Society and the extended family were, and are still, largely responsible for educating young people in their gendered roles. In many African societies traditional means of socialisation have been replaced by urbanisation, westernisation and by the introduction of Western education (Meekers *et al*, 1995). In many cases this poses a direct threat to young people's identity and self-esteem, as school is often perceived to be only for young children, thus making the school a step backwards from an initiation ceremony and the search for adult status (Tefferi, 2007).

All societies teach young people acceptable skills, knowledge and behaviour that are deemed important to adulthood and their gendered roles. The process of socialisation is concerned with the learning process by way of a given society or social group so they can function within it (Hardman, 2001). In many sub-Saharan African settings young people acquire knowledge within a cultural setting that values the authority of elders and emphasises practical knowledge. Yet on the other hand, young people are schooled in a formal system in which the authority of elders is devalued and undermined (Semali, 1999). Education becomes a source of information which may conflict with the cultural knowledge provided by elders. Traditional forms of education are replaced, or appear to be in contrast, to the teachings in society by elder generations. This complicates the learning process, potentially causing conflict between traditional socialisation and Western education (Breidlid, 2009).

### ***Educating girls***

One of the most dramatic trends in developing countries over the past 20-30 years has been the rapid rise in both school participation and grade attainment particularly for girls (Lloyd, 2006). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include two goals that are related to education and gender equality. These two goals are shown in Figure 2.1. These goals are to be achieved through educational objectives, including completing a full course of primary education and eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education.



**Figure 2.1: Education related Millennium Development Goals**

**Millennium Development Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education

*Target 3:* Ensure that by 2005 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

**Millennium Development Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women

*Target 4:* Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

(Source: Adapted from UN, 2007)

To help achieve the second development goal, some sub-Saharan African countries have abolished school fees, for example, Kenya in 2003. Kenyan schools were increased with an extra 1.3 million young people who had previously been excluded; of these nearly half were girls (UNICEF, 2004b). Table 2.1 shows other sub-Saharan African countries that have abolished school fees and the number of young people who enrolled after the fees were eradicated. It is worth remembering there may be a difference between enrolment and attendance figures. As Table 2.1 demonstrates, all four countries have shown a significant increase in their enrolment rates varying from a 1.1 million increase in Malawi to 4 million in Uganda. Advances towards the third development goal have shown that by 2005 out of 106 developing countries, 83 had achieved gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment (UN, 2007). Increasing the number of young people in school, and in particular addressing gender disparity, can have an effect on young people's employment opportunities, health, age of sexual debut and age of marriage and childbearing.

**Table 2.1: Enrolment Pre and Post Fee Abolition**

Country	Enrolment before fee abolition	Enrolment post fee abolition
Malawi	1.9 million	3 million
Tanzania	1.4 million	3 million
Uganda	2.5 million	6.5 million
Kenya	5.9 million	7.2 million

(Source: Taken from 'Enrolment pre fee abolition and enrolment post abolition', UNICEF, 2004: 35)

The increase in school enrolments can have direct implications for the quality of education for young people (World Bank & UNICEF, 2009). With greater numbers

of young people in school this results in larger class sizes, limited resources such as desks and chairs with less individual attention given to students. There are however, some governments are rising to this challenge. To meet the demand in Tanzania in 2002 the government launched the Primary Education Development Plan, which trained tens of thousands more teachers and provided grants for renovation, textbooks and construction of new classrooms and schools (Cotton, 2008).

Across the world in 2005 approximately 72 million young people of primary school age were not in school, of whom 57% were girls (UN, 2007). As basic education expands so does the demand for senior secondary schooling (Yamada & Ghartey-Ampiah, 2008). There is however, a lack of facilities or insufficient resources to increase enrolment resulting in a large number of girls unable attend secondary school (UNICEF, 2007). Table 2.2 shows the enrolment ratio of males and females in both primary and secondary schools in selected countries. As table 2.2 shows for both males and females enrolment rates are higher in primary schools compared to secondary schools. Enrolment rates in secondary school are for the majority of countries, significantly lower than primary schools. This is understandable given the costs of secondary education.

**Table 2.2: Primary and Secondary School Enrolment Ratios**

Country	Primary School Enrolment Ratio 2000-2007 (net)		Secondary School Enrolment Ratio 200-2007 (net)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Burkina Faso	52	42	14	10
Chad	71	50	16	5
Ethiopia	74	69	29	19
The Gambia	59	64	40	37
Kenya	75	76	43	42
Malawi	88	94	25	23
Senegal	71	70	23	18
Zambia	90	94	31	25

(Source: Adapted from data from UNICEF, 2009: 134-136)

There are problems when addressing education for girls. These include retention, completion rates and drop-out rates. Drop-out rates can be very sharp from primary to secondary level, particularly in countries that have made primary education universal, because of the high cost of secondary education (Garcia & Fares, 2006). In addition, many young people may subsequently drop out during the final grade, therefore never receiving their final exam results or even sitting them. In general,

completion rates are lower for girls than for boys. In the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa it is estimated that one third or more of young people may not actually graduate from primary school (UN, 2007). In many developing countries the direct and indirect costs of schooling are significant barriers to girls' education. These include school uniform, textbooks, stationery, lack of school sanitation, as well as early marriage, sexual harassment, safety, household responsibilities and parental attitudes. Many of these latter reasons become more significant around the time a girl reaches puberty. Girls who are enrolled in school often drop out when they reach puberty (UNICEF, 2007). Lack of water and sanitation can be problematic, particularly for girls, who are less likely to attend schools that have no suitable facilities (Ansell, 2005).

When school fees are not an issue, the perceived and real opportunity costs associated with sending young people to school can discourage parents from supporting girls' education. Parents' objections to their daughters going to school are more likely to be on the grounds of safety or economics than out of a belief that girls should not be educated (UNICEF, 2004). There are also prejudices regarding girls whilst they are in school, often leading them to leave and ignore their education. Girls are often in male dominated schools, which can lead to violence against girls in school by students and teachers. Studies suggest that there are instances of sexual and gender based violence being prevalent in schools; with much violence directed at girls (UNICEF, 2007). In focus groups involving young people in Kenya, girls revealed how they were sexually harassed in school while boys discussed how they harassed girls (Lloyd & Mensch cited in Bledsoe et al, 1999).

### **Education and the Path to Adulthood**

In the West a lengthening in process of transitions is widely attributed to more extended periods spent in formal education (Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004). Over the course of the past 200 years the expansion of mass education has been a powerful force in restructuring the transition to adulthood in industrialised nations (Wyness, 2006). Young people's participation in school influences their transition to adulthood by reshaping the time available to engage in other activities (Grant & Furstenberg, 2007). However, as the educational composition of developing countries continues to change it is important to understand how subsequent transitions in early adulthood may be affected (Grant & Furstenberg, 2007).

Approaches and experiences of childhood are changing partly because of education and this can intervene in young people's conventional transitions to adulthood (Ansell, 2004). Education can have a positive impact on young people's lives beyond just learning. For example, there is an associated link between education and aspects of reproduction. This has led to a justification of girls' education being formulated specifically on the grounds of its supposed impact on future children (Burman, 2008). Many young people are in school during the period when otherwise they would be likely to cross those boundaries that conventionally would bring them adult status such as work, marriage and childbearing (Valentine, 2003).

Adult roles are not acquired at the same time, therefore this thesis refers to multiple transitions. Transitions are usually seen as important turning points in an individual's life (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). The thesis will focus upon six transitions including domestic roles and responsibilities, work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation ceremonies, marriage and childbearing. These transitions may or may not be connected and may occur simultaneously (Langevang, 2008). The transitions examined in the thesis are interconnected through a complex combination of factors from changes in the job market, greater demands in education and changing ideas of marriage and childbearing. The six transitions focused upon in this thesis explore the interconnections between the productive and reproductive domains of young people's lives.

### **'Women's Work': Domestic Roles and Responsibilities**

Young people's unpaid household work is frequently underestimated, undervalued and unrecorded. Domestic work is often disguised as 'training' or 'helping' adults. This view undermines the value and importance of young people's work in its own right and having their own worth (Punch, 2001). Many young people are more than just helpers, often assuming full responsibility for certain household tasks. The amount and type of young people's participation in tasks increases as they get older. As well as acquiring a greater workload the tasks they perform increase in complexity and responsibility (Punch, 2001).

Research on livelihoods among young people has tended to neglect gender dimensions, underplaying the household work performed by young women (Jones & Chant, 2009). Many young women are virtually entrapped in the domestic sphere. By

being confined to the home, girls are kept out of the public arena, so their sexuality is controlled and this allows them to undergo their training for womanhood; for lifelong roles as wives and mothers (Mensch *et al*, 1998). Domestic labour is deemed fundamentally to be ‘women’s work’ in accordance with the normative ideal that in adulthood women should be the principal homemakers in the household (Jones & Chant, 2009). Girls are often expected to assist mothers and other female relatives with domestic duties such as childcare, preparing food, fetching firewood and water and cleaning. Older girls may be restricted to indoor tasks such as cooking and washing due to the need of parents to have control over the older female child’s sexuality by controlling their labour (Mensch *et al*, 1998).

Expected gender roles and responsibilities contribute to the unequal treatment of girls and boys (Brannen, 1995: 319; Ansell, 2005: 64). Time spent doing domestic work is unevenly distributed by gender and age among young people. Robson’s (2004) research in Nigeria shows that as many as one in five boys reported doing no domestic work, whereas all girls reported doing domestic work (Robson, 2004). This gender disparity often happens from early childhood; boys are allowed to play whereas girls have to do domestic chores. When girls are allowed to play it appears to be designed to accommodate their domestic tasks. Girls are expected to remain close to home when they play so that they can still care for younger siblings and be on call to meet the demands of their elders (Mensch *et al*, 1998). Girls often take over household duties and childcare in order to free their mothers’ time for paid labour. This is called the ‘mother-daughter substitute effect’; as mothers take on paid work outside the home, girls assume domestic responsibilities often at the expense of their education (UNICEF, 2007).

### ***The multiple burden: Education and domestic roles***

Due to traditional gender roles many young women suffer the multiple burdens of housework, schoolwork and/ or work outside the home, either paid or unpaid (UNICEF, 2007). The pressure of domestic responsibilities, together with lack of space and light to work, may interfere with homework, by restricting their ability to concentrate on their studies (Ansell, 2005). These multiple burdens can also be extended to girls who have dropped out of school and those out of school as they experience the burdens of work and domestic responsibilities. The process of preparing young women to become good wives and mothers can lead to school non-

attendance and an increase in drop-out rates (Admassie, 2003). Older daughters may miss schooling opportunities because they may have to undertake unpaid domestic work and be expected to look after younger siblings.

As young people move through the transitions to adulthood and assume more work responsibilities, the daily lives of boys become increasingly different from the daily lives of girls (Ritchie *et al*, 2004). A study in Kenya indicates that schoolgirls spend an average of almost two hours a day on domestic duties while schoolboys spend less than one hour a day on such tasks (Mensch *et al*, 1998). The disparity between girls' and boys' domestic load is most significant among young people who are not in school. In terms of debating child labour, one of the various factors put forward to account for the under-enrolment of girls in school is that they work twice as many hours as boys, and their domestic responsibilities are continuous rather than time limited (Burman, 1995). Girls who are not enrolled in school are thought to be involved in five to seven hours of domestic work daily (Ritchie *et al*, 2004). In Kenya out-of-school girls perform more than eight times as much domestic work as out-of-school boys (Mensch *et al*, 1998).

### **Formal and Informal Work: A Continuation of Experience**

In the West work is seen as one of the most important transitions a young person can go through to reach adulthood. This transition involves being economically productive in their own right with the ability to support themselves and others (Lloyd *et al*, 2005). In the West child labour is condemned as being incompatible with childhood. It is seen as exploitative and damaging to young people's social, physical and psychological development (James & James, 2008). Unlike the Western world, in many developing world societies, work is seen as the role of every household member for the benefit of the family. Many young people work during their childhood; therefore, work is seen as a process of continuation. Most young people spend a proportion of their time performing various jobs without thinking of it as work. This is because they consider work as part of their everyday lives and cultural obligations (Abebe, 2007). There is no distinct transition to being an employed adult; for many young people work is a continuity of experience (Ansell, 2005).

Young people's work is part of household production and is an ongoing process of socialisation. Young people are expected to contribute while at the same

time learn the necessary skills that will enable them to be active members of their community (Abebe, 2007). Young people may work out of necessity for the family due to poverty but many value the experience for the learning it offers and self-esteem they derive from the experience (Brown, 2001). Young people face challenges to work including their involvement in child labour, low educational attainment and primarily informal sector employment (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Table 2.3 shows the percentage of young people aged 5-15 years economically active in sub-Saharan Africa. As Table 2.3 illustrates there is a vast difference across sub-Saharan Africa where the lowest percentage of young people working are in Kenya, whilst the greatest percentage is in Sierra Leone where over 70% of young people are economically active.

**Table 2.3: Percentage of young people aged 5-15 years economically active in sub-Saharan Africa**

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(Source: Fig 3.1 'Too many children are working in many sub-Saharan African countries' Garcia & Fares, 2008: 9)

In the sub-Saharan African countries shown in the table, an average 35% of children under the age of 15 years work outside the home (Garcia & Fares, 2008). These estimates are likely to miscalculate child labour as the various activities undertaken by young people are difficult to capture and the work undertaken maybe missed by surveys (Garcia & Fares, 2008).

Young people face many challenges on their continuation of work including starting work too early, failing to enter the labour market and having difficulties moving across jobs and up the skill chain (Garcia & Fares, 2008). Working is an

important means for young people to develop adult roles and responsibilities; however, unemployment obstructs the movement of young people to adulthood (Population Council, 2000). In Africa young people make up as much as 36% of the total working age population yet three in five of Africa's unemployed are young people (World Bank, 2008). In the majority of African societies young people living in poverty are likely to experience transitions to work at an earlier age and are more likely to work in the informal (and often illegal) sectors (Van Blerk, 2008). Van Blerk's (2008) study in Ethiopia shows how sex workers migrate as part of their transition to adulthood as young people take on responsibilities of providing for themselves and their families from as young as 13 or 14 years old. Despite the low wages earned such migrations are considered successful transitions to adulthood, as young people are able to provide support to family members remaining in rural areas (Van Blerk, 2008).

### ***Young women's multiple burdens***

Working appears to be damaging to school attainment because dropping out of school reduces the amount young people learn (Garcia & Fares, 2008). If students have to drop out of school they miss opportunities and skills that schools provide in making a successful transition to adulthood. The transitions to employment and independent family life are particularly problematic for those living in situations of poverty where there is limited access to education and training. In 29 countries in sub-Saharan Africa an estimated 52% of young people working were also attending school (World Bank, 2007). Many young people are able to combine lessons with work because the school they go to functions on a half-day basis. In The Gambia this is called the 'double-shift' system, where some students attend in the morning and some attend in the afternoon. This allows students to negotiate the fulfilment of economic responsibilities at home with school (Abebe, 2007).

Punch (2004) has explored school-to-work transitions of young people in rural Bolivia. She argues how interdependent social relationships, livelihood systems and kinship relations interact in multiple ways. This influences how young people combine work with formal schooling and their decisions as to whether to participate in labour. When combining the two, work can interfere with schooling by absorbing too much time while the ability to learn is adversely affected by fatigue (UNICEF, 2001: 58; Admassie, 2003: 178).



Some studies argue that working young people often perform better in school also allowing them to pay for their own and in many case their siblings' education (Population Council, 2000). Working may enable them to finance upper secondary and tertiary education that would otherwise be unaffordable. Although contemporary African young people are significantly better educated than previous generations, the formal work sector is unable to generate sufficient employment to absorb the rapidly growing segment of the labour force (Calves & Schaumaker, 2004). Secondary education has taken on a much more distinct role in the transitional stage of work. Only if young people continue on to secondary education and are able to complete that cycle are they able to expect a different sort of future.

Many young people experience a prolonging of the transition from school-to-work. A study by Guarcello *et al* (2005) shows that in Cameroon, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique entry into the labour force is five years or longer after leaving secondary school. These results show that young people in these selected countries are met with significant labour market entry problems and may spend a large proportion of their time in search of a job and being unemployed. It is generally believed that higher educational attainment leads to better employment opportunities, however, for young people this is not always evident (Guarcello *et al*, 2005). Figure 2.2 shows how higher education achievement does not always relay into employment.

### **Figure 2.2: Educational Attainment and Unemployment Rates**

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(Source: Fig 4 'Unemployment rates for youth, by educational attainment', Guarcello *et al*, 2005: 5)

As figure 2.2 shows that in all but one of the countries selected above, Ghana, higher educational achievement does not lead to a decrease in unemployment rates for young people aged 15-24 years. In Côte d'Ivoire unemployment rates for young people with tertiary education are doubled the unemployment rates for young people with a primary education.

Many young women in many developing countries do not experience the transition from school-to-work. This is because it does not take place or is interrupted because of marriage and childbearing or because it is socially unacceptable for them to work outside the home (Garcia & Fares, 2008). If young women are able to work it enables them to have better livelihood opportunities by strengthening their economic and social capacities, helping them to gain autonomy and improve their future prospects (Brady *et al*, 2007). There is little opportunity of formal sector employment without secondary education for young women (Ansell, 2004). For poor families, bearing the opportunity cost of sending a girl to school may not seem to be economically justifiable in the short term. This is especially the case in societies that do not hold the attitude that women have the right to paid employment or where jobs for educated women are scarce (UNICEF, 2004). By providing young women with one extra year of education beyond the average boosts eventual wages by 10-20% (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

### **Sexual and Reproductive Knowledge and Behaviour**

In terms of development, sexual experiences signal an important dimension of the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is because they either occur at the time of marriage and/or parenthood or they bring with them opportunities for further emotional and relational development (Blanc *et al*, 2005). The youth period is a time when many young people first engage in sexual activity, potentially increasing a young woman's risk of unplanned pregnancy, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Behaviours that young people adopt during puberty, in particular unprotected sex, have critical implications for their future health (Blanc *et al*, 2005).

Sexual activity among young people has been identified as a cause for concern due to its social and reproductive health impacts, the effect of the HIV/AIDS crisis on young people has made it even more imperative to understand the interaction between young people, gender and sexualities (McIlwaine & Datta, 2004). Women account for

nearly 60% of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa, with 3.2 million young people aged 15-24 years living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2007). The continuing growth in the numbers of young people, as well as the lengthening period of years spent unmarried but sexually active, ensure a rapid and continuing growth in young people's need for sexual health education, as well as for reproductive and other health services (Blanc *et al*, 2005).

In some sub-Saharan African cultures the responsibility for transmitting sexual information to young people lies not with parents but with other adult relatives such as grandmothers or aunts (Cohen *et al*, 2005). A study in Mozambique found close relatives are often not the ones most trusted in reproductive and family planning matters even though these matters ostensibly are at the core of the family's concern (Agadjanian, 2001). This may lead to misinformation or inadequate knowledge and can lead young people to engage in unprotected sex. Peer groups are increasingly important to young people as they spend more time in the company of each other than of adults; therefore peers also play an important part in transmitting knowledge. Peer groups are seen as potentially having a negative influence on young people, particularly in terms of their sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour (Ansell, 2005).

### ***School: Family-life education, the 'social vaccine' and sexual harassment***

With a rise in formal schooling more young people have to negotiate sexual maturation and sexual initiation in a different context from that of older generations (Biddlecom *et al*, 2008). The rapid growth in school attendance in developing countries has meant that a rising proportion of young people are becoming sexually mature while still attending school (Lloyd, 2006). Students are likely to experience premarital sex before they leave school, particularly as progression to secondary school becomes more common (Biddlecom *et al*, 2008).

Reproductive health has become a concern for young people and schools are used to promote sexual health in the face of the AIDS epidemic. In an attempt to reduce teenage pregnancies and to reduce STIs, many sub-Saharan African governments, including South Africa and Botswana, have introduced a family-life education programme in the school curriculum (Yankah & Aggleton, 2008). The introduction of family-life education is to teach responsibilities and behaviours of adult life to young people in a school setting. Many organisations have documented

the success of these programmes and have suggested that school-based reproductive health education programmes can increase knowledge and the adoption of safe sexual behaviour (World Bank, 2007). The lack of correct knowledge surrounding reproductive health may be assumed to contribute to various health issues, such as the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, female circumcision and unwanted pregnancy (Moukhyer, 2006).

In the absence of a cure for HIV/AIDS, education is thought to be the best defence against the disease; acting as a 'social vaccine' (Aikman *et al*, 2008). The more educated young people are, the more likely they are to protect themselves from infection and those who are in school spend less time in risky situations (UNICEF, 2004). Figure 2.3 illustrates the percentage of young women in selected sub-Saharan African countries who have comprehensive and appropriate knowledge of HIV by educational level. As the graph shows, in most of the countries featured young women who have reached secondary education are twice, or in some cases three times more likely to have knowledge about HIV.

**Figure 2.3: Percentage of young women aged 15-24 years who have comprehensive and appropriate knowledge of HIV by educational level**

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(Source: Adapted from Fig 4 'Percentage of women (aged 15-24) who have comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV', UNICEFb, 2004: 6)

There is a body of evidence suggesting that sexual abuse and harassment take place in some schools throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Shumba, 2001). The increase in school enrolment intensifies the contact between boys and girls, undermines the

authority of parents and this increases the likelihood young women will have premarital sex (Mensch *et al*, 2001). These trends, coupled with the steadily decreasing age of puberty and the greater likelihood of still attending school after puberty, mean that an increasing number of young women are exposed to the risk of sexual activity and pregnancy prior to marriage (Mensch *et al*, 1998). The increase in schooling may have led to increased rates of sexual activity among young women in sub-Saharan Africa for yet another reason. With the high cost of school fees this may force young women whose parents cannot afford to educate all their offspring to acquire older sexual partners. Such 'sugar daddies' and sponsors give young women money for school expenses and other needs in exchange for sexual favours (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2007).

### **Initiation Ceremonies**

In some cultures an initiation ceremony marks the transition to adulthood. While some coming-of-age rituals like the High School prom or debutant ball in the USA are shaped in part by youths themselves, most rites of passage that have been studied by anthropologists are in the hands of adult members of the community, for example, the Jewish Bar Mitzvah and Christian Confirmation (Bucholtz, 2002). In sub-Saharan Africa a rite-of-passage is designed to provide a cultural framework which often marks the point at which young people first take on adult roles and share in the full privileges and duties of the community (Adegoke, 2001: 27; Ansell, 2005: 78).

During initiation ceremonies young people are taught to take on adult roles and responsibilities in their families and communities. Traditional initiation ceremonies vary across ethnic groups but their general purpose is to train young people for adulthood (Evans, 2006: 124; Tefferi, 2007: 298). A common ceremony in sub-Saharan Africa is the puberty rite or puberty ritual. This ritual for young women marks their attainment of sexual maturity and is considered a necessary lead-up to marriage (Kapungue, 2003). Young women are advised on appropriate social behaviour, duties and responsibilities particularly towards their husbands and in-laws, their domestic roles and responsible sexual behaviour. Initiation rites for boys are similar to girls in that they are used to communicate the roles and responsibilities of being a man. Boys are expected to imitate their fathers, spending more and more time away from home performing masculine tasks.

### ***Female ‘circumcision’ and restructuring the practice***

In some sub-Saharan African countries initiation rites for young women include female ‘circumcision’<sup>3</sup> ceremonies. Globally in 2000, an estimated 130 million girls and women have undergone ‘circumcision’ and at least two million girls each year are likely to undergo the procedure (Cook *et al*, 2002). Figure 2.4 shows the estimated prevalence of female ‘circumcision’ in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Figure 2.4: The estimated prevalence of female ‘circumcision’ in sub-Saharan Africa**

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(Source: Cited in UNICEF Fig 1 ‘FGM/C prevalence among women aged 15-49’, UNICEF, 2005: 5)

Figure 2.4 shows the practice is widely carried out throughout sub-Saharan Africa but prevalence rates display significant regional and geographic variations. The percentage of young women circumcised varies between countries from 99% in Guinea to 5% in Ghana and Niger<sup>4</sup>. Current global estimates of the prevalence of

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<sup>3</sup> Increasingly widespread is the term ‘female genital mutilation’ or ‘FGM’. In all contexts this thesis will use female ‘circumcision’ (in quotations) to acknowledge the ambiguity of this term.

<sup>4</sup> Disparities in female ‘circumcision’ rates in The Gambia will be explored further in Chapter Three.

female 'circumcision' are tentative, as national representative data does not exist in many countries. Global figures need to be interpreted cautiously as the practice varies within countries between regions and from one ethnic group to another and for some countries reliable figures on prevalence are not available (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2001). Data on female 'circumcision' may be best understood through different ethnic groups, for example, in The Gambia the Wolof do not practice whereas most other ethnic groups do.

Figure 2.4 also depicts the sub-Saharan African countries where female 'circumcision' is not widely practised; this does not mean that it is not practised but that the prevalence is very low. Female 'circumcision' is normally undertaken as a group event, emphasising the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The procedure can be performed at any time from birth to just before marriage but is most commonly performed around puberty (Brady, 1999). A woman's gender identity, social status, ethnicity, marriagability and even her morality can be established, strengthened or weakened in the eyes of her community by her 'circumcision' status and the type of procedure she has undergone (Jones et al, 2004). The reasons for the practice include purification and to reduce sexual desire so that a woman will remain a virgin until she is married. In many communities young women are not eligible for marriage unless they are circumcised. There is also the girls desire to conform to peer norms which may make them eager to undergo 'circumcision' since those who remain uncut may be teased and looked down on by their peers (Althaus, 1997).

In many cultures the procedure is performed at such an early age that it cannot be defined as a transition into womanhood. Hernlund (2000) describes, in many African societies where female 'circumcision' was traditionally carried out as part of girls' coming of age ritual, it is becoming increasingly common for the practice to be performed at younger and younger ages. This makes the ceremony a purely physical procedure with little or no accompanying celebration or transmission of cultural knowledge, a trend that Hernlund describes as 'cutting without ritual'; this is the case in The Gambia. In some African cultures female 'circumcision' sometimes takes place well before puberty and does not bear any direct relationship to marriage as in other African contexts. Whereas in the past initiation occurred shortly before marriage, nowadays young women are often circumcised long before they are married (Johnson, 2000).

***Education: Social confusion, reducing the practice and creating an alternative***

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa the formal schooling system is gradually replacing traditional initiation ceremonies as the institution that socialises young people into assuming the responsibilities of adulthood (Meekers *et al*, 1995). Tensions between traditional culture and formal schooling are particularly visible when young people stay in school past the point of physical maturation or the onset of puberty. In such settings the continuation of young women in school causes social confusion; a schoolgirl is viewed as a child from a social point of view, however, a young woman who has been initiated is considered by society as a social adult (Lloyd & Mensch, 1999).

Studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that female ‘circumcision’ is more prevalent among less educated women (Herz & Sperling, 2004). The amount of education a mother has received is also a factor. Educated women are less than half as likely to be subjected to female ‘circumcision’ and four times more likely to oppose female ‘circumcision’ for their daughters (UNAIDS /UNFPA/ UNIFEM, 2006). Figure 2.5 shows the percentage of women who oppose female ‘circumcision’ by educational level. As the graph illustrates, the higher the level of education the more likely women are to oppose the practice. The data for Mali and Sudan is lower than for the other countries, possibly because these two countries have a higher prevalence of the practice and traditions are hard to change.

**Figure 2.5: Percentage of women who oppose female ‘circumcision’ by educational level**

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(Source: Adapted from Fig 10 ‘Women who oppose female genital cutting, by educational level’, Population Reference Bureau, 2001: 15)



Figure 2.6 shows the prevalence of female ‘circumcision’ by educational level. As the graph illustrates those with a higher level of education are less likely to have undergone ‘circumcision’. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Sudan the data shows that educational level has little impact on the number of girls being circumcised. In general the prevalence of female ‘circumcision’ is lower among educated women, however, some young women are circumcised at such a young age their education does not have an impact.

**Figure 2.6: Prevalence of female ‘circumcision’ by educational level**

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(Source: Adapted from Fig 5 ‘Prevalence of female genital cutting, by educational level’, Population Reference Bureau, 2001: 10)

There is currently worldwide opposition to female ‘circumcision’ and there have been attempts to eradicate female ‘circumcision’ through education or legislation (Shell-Duncan, 2001). A less controversial approach has been to promote change in values and attitudes towards female ‘circumcision’ as part of a larger process of social change. In various countries across sub-Saharan Africa, for example, The Gambia, Uganda and Kenya, organisations opposing female ‘circumcision’ have established alternative rites of passage. In The Gambia one organisation, GAMCOTRAP, is attempting to raise the awareness of harmful traditional practices including female ‘circumcision’ through mass media, advocacy and community based programmes. The organisation has also established an alternative rite of passage, which will be explored in further detail in chapters three and six. In Kenya the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) have used an alternative Coming of Age Programme to encourage societies to abandon female ‘circumcision’ in seven of

Kenya's 63 districts. The programme still teaches young women about the responsibilities of womanhood but without the cutting. Some of the messages are adapted to encourage positive female traditional values without the physical act of the practice (Population Reference Bureau, 2001).

### **Marriage: the Pivotal Point of Womanhood**

In many African societies marriage is seen as the most crucial landmark towards womanhood. Most societies and cultures view marriage as a normal and desirable expected rite of passage, where young women are often defined solely as wives and mothers (Cohen, 2004). For example, in Lesotho the transition to womanhood is perceived to be facilitated by three aspects: first becoming a daughter-in-law, second having her first child, and third acquiring an independent homestead (Boehm, 2006). This narrow view exposes young women to responsibilities and risks they are often not physically, emotionally or mentally prepared to undertake, while at the same time disrupting their prospects for education and employment (Mathur *et al*, 2003).

The timing of a young woman's menstruation is associated with the first steps towards marriage. Early age marriage is considered customary for many young women in sub-Saharan Africa. As young women approach puberty and begin to develop sexual awareness they are deemed ready for marriage (Kesby *et al*, 2006). Therefore, marriage is not necessarily a marker of adulthood, particularly for the numerous young women who marry during their youth years (Mensch, 2005). The value of virginity and fears about pre-marital sexual activity is a significant indicator for the practice of early marriage (Cohen, 2004). Among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, young women are married as soon as they are sexually mature with most marrying between 12 and 16 years (Ansell, 2005). Table 2.4 shows the percentage of young women married by age 18 in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Table 2.4: Percentage of women married by age 18**

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of women age 20-24 married by 18</b>
Benin	34.4
Cameroon	47.2
Chad	71.5
Ghana	37.9
Malawi	48.9
Mali	70.6
Niger	74.5
Uganda	46.3

(Source: Adapted from DHS data, 2006a)

International agencies and NGOs have emphasised the potentially harmful consequences of young women marrying early in terms of their human rights and reproductive health (Clark, 2004: 149; Bruce & Clark, 2004: 1). Early marriage is a risk factor in acquiring HIV/AIDS as many young women may be coerced into marrying an older man.

### ***Education's effects on transitions to marriage***

In many societies in sub-Saharan Africa marriage in most societies is increasingly postponed, creating a new life stage between childhood and marriage due to a lengthening of school years (Ansell, 2005). Education is thought to give greater influence over the timing of marriage and the choice of partner, broaden a young women's perspective and lengthens the marriage search process because of a general tendency for women to marry higher status men (National Research Council, 2005). With an increased amount of time spent in school, the period between menarche and marriage is lengthened, extending the period of premarital exposure to the risk of pregnancy (Adegoke, 2001).

In most societies there is a gap between age at leaving school and age at marriage so many young women experience at least some of their pre-marriage years out-of-school (Lloyd & Mensch cited in Bledsoe *et al*, 1999). On average, women in sub-Saharan Africa with seven or more years of education marry at the age of 20 or above. As with schoolgirl pregnancy, it is frequently asserted that early marriage deprives young women of educational opportunities, yet there is little evidence to suggest they are withdrawn from school to marry (Mensch, 2005). Daughters traditionally join their husbands' parents household; therefore, parents doubt how much they will benefit from having an educated daughter (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

### **Childbearing a Natural Progression from Marriage**

Women are primarily considered in terms of reproductive activities; with childhood thoroughly gendered a girl is regarded as an incipient woman and thus as a future mother (Burman, 1995). Adulthood for women is strongly focused around the conception and bearing of children. When young women are unable to gain full womanhood standing through marriage, they may be able to gain status through bearing a child (MacCleod, 2003). Table 2.5 shows the number of young women aged 15-19 who had begun childbearing. Once a young woman has started menstruation, fear of pregnancy becomes a major concern for family members who are responsible for 'protecting' her sexuality (Cohen, 2004). The pregnancy of a young woman brings into visibility not only her transgression of the child/ adult boundaries, but also her sexuality (Macleod, 2003).

**Table 2.5: Percentage of young women aged 15-19 who had begun childbearing**

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(Source: Adapted from DHS data, 2006b)

### ***Childbearing incompatible with schooling***

Girls' fertility has come under analysis because of both the possible negative health effects for girls and because of its disruption of their schooling (Madhavan & Thomas, 2005). Links between education and aspects of reproduction has led to rationales for girls' education being formulated specifically on the grounds of its supposed impact on future fertility (Burman, 1995). Women with some formal education are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, immunise children, are better informed about nutrition and more likely to use family planning methods. It has been estimated each year of schooling that a girl undertakes leads up to 10% reduction

of under-five mortality (Shabaya & Kondadu-Agyemang, 2007). In most cases educated women also tend to have fewer children (Herz & Sperling, 2004). When women gain four years or more education, fertility drops by roughly one birth per woman (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

While early childbearing has been common in many societies in sub-Saharan Africa in the past, it occurred mainly to married women and generally did not interfere with the life course of young women because relatively few attended school (Meekers *et al*, 1995). In most developing countries marriage, childbearing and continued schooling are typically incompatible. In contemporary African societies a strong normative pressure to become a parent co-exist with conflicting pressures to attain a high level of education. This results in mixed messages to young people, that women must start bearing children at a young age and are expected to do so within marriage, but that they should stay in school which requires postponing marriage and childbearing.

In sub-Saharan Africa there is a general belief that were it not for pregnancy among schoolgirls educational retention rates for young women would be higher. Literature addressing young people's fertility in the developing world is large, yet few studies have focused on the prevalence on schoolgirl pregnancy (Grant & Hallman, 2006). Lloyd & Mensch (2008) have calculated a range of estimates for the number of girls dropping out of school prior to secondary school completion resulting from marriage or pregnancy. They estimated this level was 20% in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Toga and nearly 40% in Cameroon (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

There is a high cost associated with becoming pregnant while in school. Policies dealing with schoolgirl pregnancy usually take three forms: expulsion from school, re-entry to school after the birth or continuation at school (Chilisa, 2002). In most sub-Saharan African countries social norms and various constraints often compel young women to leave school when they get pregnant. Boys who father the children do not face the same sanctions (Lloyd & Mensch, 2006). Allowing schoolgirls who get pregnant to continue with their education has been one of the strategies to give boys and girls equal opportunity to educational access and participation. The Diphilana project in Botswana focuses on pregnant girls and fathers-to-be who would typically drop-out of school. The project provides free day care for the children of teenage parents together with parenting classes (UNICEF, 2001). There are only a few countries trying to encourage the return of young women

to school after they have had a baby. In Cameroon young women can negotiate with their schools on the duration of maternity leave and can arrange for extra classes to be organised so that they do not fall behind their classmates (Chilisa, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

Activities and experiences during childhood are seen as behaviours preparing young people for adulthood. There are various childhood approaches, including social, cultural, developmental psychology and legal. These approaches of how childhoods are experienced affect young people's transitions to adulthood. Young people experience critical transitions in their lives including biological, social, economic and psychological changes. These transitions are now seen to occur at various points in the life course rather than a fixed linear progression. A young person's life trajectory involves navigating and making fundamental decisions relating to the transitions out of school, into work, into sexual relations, into marriage, into parenting and generally assuming adult roles and behaviours (National Research Council, 2005). Transitions to adulthood are increasingly gendered.

With the spread of formal schooling in the developing world young people have been experiencing rapid social and economic changes with implications for their future in adulthood (Quist, 2001). Not all of these changes are positive and education has presented challenges to the conventional transitions to adulthood. Raising levels of girls' schooling even by a few years has widely documented benefits. Extending schooling can be seen as a first building block in a societal pathway toward establishing greater gender equality for adults. Although female students still carry a slightly heavier workload and enjoy less leisure time than male students these gender differences are trivial compared with the gender differences in time use that are apparent among young people who do not attend school (Ritchie *et al*, 2004). Educated young women become educated mothers with increased livelihood prospects; they also have a greater propensity than similarly educated males to invest in children's schooling and often give special attention to daughters' education. Thus, the benefits of the education are passed on to the next generation (Mensch *et al*, 1998). The following chapter will examine the role of education on girls' transitions to womanhood in The Gambia.

## Education and Transitions to Womanhood in The Gambia

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### Introduction

This chapter will put into context arguments from the previous chapter on transitions to adulthood which are relevant to The Gambia. This chapter is a review of the relevant literature important to the notions of transitions to adulthood. There is a limited amount of literature on The Gambia and the extensive use of policy reports, government, international and local NGOs sometimes may make the data unreliable. This therefore justifies using The Gambia as a case study, to add to the confined data on the country. A brief synopsis of the national laws and policies put in place to support the rights of young people and women will be explored. The section following will then explore the Gambian education system to contextualise The Gambia as a case study. The chapter will then focus on the impact of education on the transitions to womanhood including domestic roles and responsibilities, work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation, marriage and childbearing.

### The Gambian Context

The Gambia is situated in West Africa bordered by Senegal with a short Atlantic Ocean coastline. The country is inhabited by 1.7 million people with a population growth rate at 3.4%, making it one of the highest in Africa (UNICEF, 2009). The Gambian population is predominantly Muslim (90%), followed by Christian (8%) and others who have indigenous beliefs (2%) (National Population Commission Secretariat, 2007b). The country is divided into one city and five regions; Banjul, Western Region (WR), North Bank Region (NBR), Lower River Region (LRR), Central River Region (CRR) and Upper River Region (URR). The Gambia is home to a wide ethnic diversity including Mandinka (42%), Fula (18%), Wolof (16%), Jola (10%), Serahuli (9%) and others (4%) (CIA, 2009). Even with such diversity all ethnic groups live peacefully together, despite their social and cultural variations. The Gambia is characterised by a young age structure, with 47% of the population under 18 years and 15% under 5 years old (UNICEF, 2009).

## **Policies Relating to Young People and Women**

In 1990 The Gambia ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and in 2000 ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Well-being of the Child. At a national level The Gambia constitution has a section emphasising child rights and in 2005 the Children's Act was put in place. It is "an act to set out the rights and responsibilities of children, to consolidate the laws relating to children, to provide for the care, protection and maintenance of children" (Republic of The Gambia, 2005, p.5). There is also a National Youth Policy focusing on youth issues including education and training, health, welfare, employment and youth justice (DOYS, 1999). The policy defines youth between the ages 13-30 years to incorporate the transitional period to adulthood.

In July 1980 The Gambia signed, and ratified in 1993, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with no reservations (UN, 2003). Since signing the CEDAW the Gambian government has attempted to incorporate some of the provisions of the CEDAW into policies and the current constitution. In regard to national laws the National Policy for the Advancement of Women was ratified in 1999, although some time after signing the CEDAW, the justification of the policy was for the government to recognise and fulfil its obligation under the CEDAW (UN, 2003). The policy is concerned with issues relating to education, health, violence, peace, power and decision-making, media, the environment and poverty.

The Gambian constitution gives equal recognition, regardless of gender, as indicated in section 28 (2), "women shall have the right to equal treatment with men, including equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities". However, this provision is weakened as the constitution states that customary law provides part of Gambian law (Bessis, 2005). The lives of over 90% of Gambian women are subject to Sharia and/or customary law, particularly in relation to marriage, divorce and inheritance, which conflict with other laws and agreements both national and international (Bessis, 2005).

There are a National Women's Council and Women's Bureau which have embarked on a number of campaigns and programmes geared towards improving women's status. Alongside these are a number of NGOs specifically for women. The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) and Foundation for Research on Women's Health, Productivity and Environment (BAFROW) aim to



eradicate harmful traditional practices, for example, female ‘circumcision’, and to promote the rights of women, good health and safe motherhood. Some of these organisations have been instrumental in attempting to establish a Women’s Bill. In 2008 the first draft of the Women’s Bill was tabled before the National Assembly for ratification although efforts are still being made to ratify this Bill (Touray, 2008).

### **The Gambia’s Education System**

The current education policy spans the period 2004-2015 and has its objectives devised within the context of the initiative ‘Education for All’ (M’Bye, 2005). The education policy aims to create equal opportunities for all, reduce illiteracy rates, attain gender equity, supply an even number of teachers of both sexes, reduce gender disparities in teacher recruitment, training, promotion and posting, establish high retention, performance and competition rates and improve performance and participation in all subjects (GOTG, 2004). Education is a challenge associated with the continuing development of The Gambia and one that the Gambian government is attempting to improve. The Gambia’s Children’s Act 2005 states in section 18, “every child has the right to free and compulsory basic education and it shall be the duty of Government to provide the education” (p.21). It further states, “every parent or guardian shall ensure that his or her child or ward attend and complete basic education” (p.21).

#### ***Structure of the education system***

*Since 2001 the education structure has been based on a 9-3-3 configuration, with the first nine years conceived as a basic education. This nine-year cycle includes Primary School (Lower Basic), Grades 1-6 and Junior Secondary School (Upper Basic), Grades 7-9. Entrance to a further three years of Senior Secondary, Grades 10-12 follows but is based upon Grade 9 examination results. This is then followed by a further three years at a tertiary institution, such as college or a vocational institute, or 4 years at university level, if financially able. Table 3.1 shows the structure of the education system.*

**Table 3.1: Structure of the education system**

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Start Age</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Subjects/Courses</b>
Nursery	3-4 years	2-3 years	English, maths, science, social skills
Madrassa	7 years		Islamic religious education, maths science, foreign languages
Lower Basic	7 years	6 years	English, maths, science, social and environmental studies, French
Upper Basic	13 years	3 years	Science and technology, agricultural science, maths, science, English, French, religious knowledge, life skills
Senior Secondary	16 years	3 years	Foreign languages, maths, science, commercial subjects, religious knowledge, arts, physical and health education, life skills, technical, agricultural science
Vocational and technical	16 years +	1-3 years	Practical, technical and commercial subjects
Gambia College	19 years	2-3 years	Teaching training, nursing, public health officers, agricultural extension workers
GTTI	19 years	2 years	Computing, construction, engineering, business
Management Development Institute	19 years	2 years	Training management, marketing, accounting, computer training
Rural Development Institute	19 years	2 years	Integrated Rural Development
University	19 years	4 years	Medicine and Health Science, Science and Agriculture, Humanities and Social Science and Economics and Management Sciences

*(Source: Adapted from data collected from DOSBSE, 2008)*

The Education Department announced a plan to create Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres for 3-6 year olds and to increase the enrolment to 50% by 2015. All the current ECD centres and nurseries are privately owned and they have no fixed curriculum or programme. As table 3.1 shows young people enter lower basic school from age seven. This age can vary due to financial constraints or parents may choose to send their children to a Madrassa school first. Concurrent to the Western school system are Madrassa schools. Although traditional Koranic schools have a long history in The Gambia, a modernised type of Islamic school, Madrassa, has provided an important alternative type of schooling to the Western style (Okuma,

2005). The Madrassa has become increasingly popular during the last 15 years and can compete with the Western style school. Many primary school aged children still attend the Madrassa prior to enrolling in the formal school system, others attend the two concurrently, while some attend Madrassa exclusively (DOSBSE, 2006). Madrassa have a structured organisation and a formal curriculum, including subjects other than religion, such as maths, science and a foreign language. Arabic is the language of instruction in the Madrassa (Okuma, 2005). During recent years an increasing number of Madrassas have introduced the teaching of English as a foreign language. This has been a part of the DOSBSE plan to introduce the national curriculum and English language teachers. Currently 149 Madrassas have enrolled in the programme (DOSE, 2008). The Madrassa support programme consists of providing English language teachers, instructional materials, including the core subjects of the national curriculum, and participation in the school feeding programme. Madrassa schools do not have any financial assistance from DOSBSE apart from the payment of the English language teacher (VSO, 2007).

If young people are not enrolled in Madrassa they are enrolled in lower basic schools before entering upper basic schools. The senior secondary school structure is divided into three streams, commerce, science and arts. These streams determine the subjects the student will study. Subjects in the commerce stream include commerce, business management, economics, accounting and mathematics. In the science stream subjects include biology, chemistry and general science whilst the art stream covers English language, English literature and arts and crafts. The first nine years of basic education are mainly provided by the government, while the senior secondary, technical and vocational, tertiary and university education are funded largely through grants, aid arrangements and the private sector (DOSBSE, 2007).

If parents of upper basic graduates have the money they are just as likely to send their children to vocational and technical institutions as to send them to a senior secondary school. Vocational and technical education and training programmes are delivered through a number of institutions and skills centres (DOSBSE, 2006). There are many training centres across The Gambia with numerous opportunities for a wide variety of courses, skills and qualifications. Institutions offering courses include the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Training, the Training Production Centre, the Anglican Training Centre, the YMCA, the Banjul Skills Centre, among a host of others (DOSBSE, 2006). Vocational education is specific training, providing

knowledge and skills for working in a specific career. It also involves following a specific career path related to the skills needed for that particular vocation. A skills training centre targets primary and upper basic school leavers, school drop-outs and unskilled and unemployed adults.

After passing further exams at senior secondary school or further qualifications at vocational institutions, and provided they have the money, students can attend either a tertiary institution or university. Tertiary institutions include the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI), Management Development Institute (MDI), Rural Development Institute (RDI) or Gambia College. The GTTI started functioning in 1983 to provide 2-year programmes to middle technical and vocational level. At the GTTI students can take courses in mechanical, electrical and construction engineering, computer technology and accounting (DOSBSE, 2006). At MDI students can enrol in middle-level training management, marketing and accounting as well as computer training courses. The RDI trains students for community development in the integrated rural development course. The Gambia College is a 2-3 year institution training students to be teachers, nurses, public health officers and agricultural extension workers. Almost all teachers in The Gambia earn their qualifications, either the Primary Teacher Certificate or the Higher Teacher Certificate at this college. University can be entered straight from senior secondary school or after completing one or more years at college. The university opened in 1999 and currently offers degrees in Medicine and Health Science, Science and Agriculture, Humanities and Social Science and Economics and Management. Senior secondary school, technical and vocational, tertiary and university education are funded largely through grant-in-aid arrangements, scholarship programmes and the private sector, although these can be gender biased in favour of girls (VSO, 2007).

### ***Enrolment disparities***

As in many sub-Saharan African countries there are disparities in enrolment, with notable differences between urban and rural areas. For example, in the urban areas surrounding Banjul and the WR total school enrolments stand at around 65%, whilst in rural areas enrolment is approximately 40% (Republic of The Gambia, 2008). Over 50% of upper basic schools are located in Banjul and the WR, this is not surprising as over 50% of the population live in these areas, there are also less than fifteen senior secondary school in the LRR, CRR and URR. Table 3.2 illustrates the

education statistics of The Gambia. The data for 2008 are estimates from the DOSBSE.

**Table 3.2: Education Statistics**

<b>Lower Basic</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Total enrolment	173,601	220,421	228,272	238,469
Gross enrolment rate	82%	85%	86%	88%
% Madrassa enrolment	10%	15%	15%	16%
% girls enrolment	49%	51%	51%	51%
Repetition rate	-	6%	5%	5%
Drop-out rate	-	15%	15%	14%
Completion rate	-	70%	73%	72%
<b>Upper Basic</b>				
Total enrolment	42,094	66,956	69,547	74,255
Gross enrolment rate	43%	59%	60%	62%
% girls enrolment	44%	46%	48%	48%
Repetition rate	-	4%	4%	4%
Completion rate	-	56%	55%	53%
Transition from G6	-	-	90%	91%
<b>Senior Secondary</b>				
Total enrolment	17,184	32,991	35,278	35,671
Gross enrolment rate	18%	32%	33%	33%
% girls enrolment	38%	42%	42%	43%
Transition from G9	-	-	52%	53%
Repetition rate	-	5%	5%	4%
Completion rate	-	27%	31%	31%

(Source: Adapted from data collected from DOSBSE, 2008)

Table 3.2 shows enrolments for lower basic schools, upper basic schools and senior secondary schools continue to increase each year. However, the data shows only approximately 30% of students reach senior secondary school. Although enrolments rates are high, the school attendance rates are much lower, at primary school boys' attendance is 60% and girls 62% and at secondary school attendance rates for boys are 39% and for girls 34% (UNICEF, 2009). At the lower basic level girls' enrolment is just over 50%; this shows the government schemes to address gender disparity at primary level have had some success. This success can also be translated to upper basic level and to some extent senior secondary level, although few students of either sex reach this level. The completion rate for senior secondary

school is also low: the table shows that 20% of students who start will not complete senior secondary school. Just over half of students at upper basic school will complete their education at this level. The government has realised that Madrassa have become a valuable alternative to Western style schools. Madrassa schools educate one in seven children and account for an estimated 15% of lower basic school enrolment. Madrassa schools have made significant progress in the CRR and URR: between 2000 and 2006 the Madrassa increased lower basic school enrolment from 66% to 87% in CRR and from 47% to 73% in URR (DOSBSE, 2008).

### ***Educating girls***

The government has focused on the third Millennium Development Goal, focusing on gender disparity, although they are not on target to achieve this goal (UNDP, 2003). There is a national campaign strongly promoting educating girls and young women. The objective of the girls' education campaign is to achieve gender equality and increase performance and retention of girls, particularly in rural areas. Various schemes have been established including the Scholarship Trust Fund, the Presidents Empowerment of Girls Education Project (PEGEP) and 'a girl friendly school initiative' funded by UNICEF. These schemes are set up, not only to meet the costs of all levels of schooling and to improve retention and performance, but also to ensure separate toilets and water for personal hygiene (Kea, 2007). The Scholarship Trust Fund and the PEGEP are designed to provide financial assistance to young women who are unable to attend school to improve their access, retention and academic performance. The schemes target young women in upper basic school and senior secondary school in rural areas and covers school fees, books and examination fees. The financial aid will cover the entire period at either school (DOSBSE, 2008). A Girl Friendly School Initiative programme (GFSI) started in 2001 in ten schools in the LRR, CRR and URR before being expanded to a further 40 schools (UNICEF, 2003). Its overall objectives were to address the particular situation of girls in The Gambia, including the large number of girls' out of school, the involvement in girls working at home, early marriages and school environments that are mainly male dominated (UNICEF, 2003).

An increase in young women's enrolment has been largely achieved by addressing the factors preventing young women from attending school, including the cost, perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, cultural/religious factors, the distance of

schools and the need to protect girls from unwanted attention (Kea, 2007). In The Gambia one of the factors contributing to potential reluctance of parents to enrol their daughters in and ensure their completion of school, is the claim that young women are not safe at school once they reach puberty (UNICEF, 2000). Some parents fear their daughters will be sexually harassed by teachers, male students and other male persons in the locality and may become pregnant. While the Education Policy is silent on schoolgirl pregnancies, it has been a social practice to withdraw young women from school when they become pregnant. This decision is taken by either the head-teacher, the parents, or the young woman herself because of the stigma of becoming pregnant whilst going to school (Jammeh- Sarr & Foon-Sarr, 2000).

### ***Challenges to education: Quality and relevance***

Although there have been successes in achieving and expanding education for young women there are still many challenges. There is still a gender gap in enrolment between boys and girls in schools and in general, this gap increases with higher education. This situation has started to change, in some lower basic schools, girls' enrolment has overtaken enrolment of boys, this is because of the vigorous campaigns and scholarships in favour of girls (DOSBSE, 2008). With the increase in enrolment the school age population is growing at a rapid rate and the greatest demand for education is in urban areas. This has increased the demand for extra school places and increased the number of students in each class. Secondary and further education continues to be a major problem as most schools are privately operated (DOSBSE, 2008). Many students are forced to terminate their education at the end of upper basic level due to monetary difficulties<sup>5</sup> or failure to pass exams.

One of the biggest challenges is the quality and relevance of education. The quality of education has an impact on students' performance and achievement. In the 2008 national exams just 20% of grade three students passed English and 18% maths; while grade five students fared little better with 30% passing English and 13% maths. Those students taking part in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in 2007, 10% passed maths, 33% passed English and 36% passed science (DOSBSE, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Many students at senior secondary school have either sponsorships or scholarships. The participating senior secondary school fees were D7675 per annum, the equivalent of £170 at the time of the research.

*A further area of concern is the lack of fully trained teachers. The teacher training institution primarily attracts low performing high school graduates with low content knowledge or those with few or no alternative careers (DOSBSE, 2006). Enrolling female graduates into the profession is a problem as it is seen as an underpaid and undervalued. In the academic year 2005-2006, only 19% of teachers in the field were female, with the majority of these female teachers based in urban areas (VSO, 2007).*

### ***Strategies to improve the education system***

To support the rise in the number of students at schools a double-shift<sup>6</sup> system was introduced in 1990 (Kea, 2007). The benefits of the double-shift system include doubling student intake without having to employ two teachers or build additional schools and classrooms; increased access and provision to schools by increasing the number of places; and allowing students to combine schooling with work as they only attend for one session in the morning or the afternoon (Kea, 2007). Schools operate two shifts, the first from 8.15am to 1.15pm and the second shift from 1.30pm to 6pm. One teacher teaches both shifts resulting in a double workload for an extra 50% increase in basic salary (Roberts-Holmes, 2003). One of the major reasons for the introduction of the double-shift system was its cost effectiveness, particularly regarding teachers' salaries (Roberts-Holmes, 2003).

The Gambian College is attempting to recruit more female graduates through its Remedial Initiative for Female Teachers Programme (RIFT). This has helped to increase the total enrolment of female students from 15% to 40% (UNICEF, 2003). Prospective female students are allowed to enter the college with a lower entrance examination mark, compared to boys, and are given extra tuition. This is to increase the number of female teachers who will act as role models and encourage parents to send their daughters to school (UNICEF, 2003).

Improvements in access to education, particularly for young women, have created alternative paths to womanhood and may challenge the more 'traditional'<sup>7</sup> transitions. The transitions examined include domestic roles and responsibilities,

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<sup>6</sup> The double-shift system in CRR and URR has proven to be less effective because of weather conditions- sometimes the classrooms are too hot (Pro-Poor Advocacy Group, 2005)

<sup>7</sup> It is important not to view 'tradition' as negative or 'modern' as positive but to understand the complexity of each term. The term tradition will be used to explain a long standing practice.



work, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation, marriage and childbearing. All of these transitions will be explored within a context of education.

### **Domestic Roles and Responsibilities: Gendered Divisions of Labour**

There is a strong cultural expectation that girls should perform particular domestic and agrarian tasks (Kea, 2007). At the household level girls and women still carry out the bulk of the domestic chores, as well as being the main family caretakers. These traditional sexual divisions of labour also have implications for the rights of the child to education and leisure. Training young women for these roles starts in early childhood through to puberty, and it is believed this training enables them to manage her own family on reaching womanhood. Young women engage in a wide variety of activities including washing clothes, sweeping the compound, cooking, fetching water, looking after siblings, going to the market to purchase food and trading in water, ice, vegetables and other foodstuff in local markets and compounds (Kea, 2007). During the peak farming time young women are required to prepare meals, care for younger siblings and undertake household chores while their mothers are in the fields (Dibba, 2007). Some family members believe that labour is the only way in which to instill in their children and grandchildren a sense of responsibility. Yet this notion of responsibility is not simply about the need to discipline and socialise children into particular gendered patterns of behaviour, but also the need to make use of their daughters labour to ensure the reproduction of the household (Kea, 2007).

### ***The multiple burden: education and domestic roles***

Training in domestic roles tends to take precedence over academic schooling as it is widely believed that young women will only need to know these responsibilities as they are simply to become wives and mothers. The increase in girls' school enrolment has had an impact on the availability of young women to work in the household and as farm labourers. A school calendar that conflicts with young women's responsibilities will have a negative effect on their enrolment, attendance and achievement in school. For many families young women's labour is essential to the household and paying school fees looks like a poor investment, especially if her parents know that she will be absent from school frequently (Kea, 2007). The introduction of the double-shift system has helped resolve some of the tensions experienced by young people between attending school and the need to take part in

domestic and farm labour. It has also allowed the additional use of their labour when it is needed as they are more readily able to fulfil these obligations combined with schooling (Kea, 2007).

### **Work: Informal and Formal**

The Gambia's Children's Act states a number of rights related to employment. Article 23 (2a) states, children have a right to work for the cohesion of his or her family. This is regarded as a responsibility of the child towards their family. Articles 41, 42 and 43 explain further laws against exploitative child labour. Article 41 (2) declares, "labour is exploitative if it deprives the child of his or her health, education or development" (34). The minimum age of light work is covered in article 43 (1), "the minimum age for the engagement of a child in light work is sixteen years. Light work means work which is not likely to be harmful to the health or development of the child and does not affect the child's attendance at school or the capacity of the child to benefit from school work" (p.34). This is also stated in the constitution. As with other laws and policies it is difficult to enforce these laws and many young people undertake paid work alongside schoolwork.

### ***The informal work sector***

Young people become involved in a variety of informal work activities even when attending school (Chant & Jones, 2005). Many young people start informal work around the same time they start primary school. Work undertaken by young people is commonly unskilled and poorly remunerated. Their activities include providing assistance to relatives on market stalls and in small family businesses or street vending. It is estimated that 27% of young people aged 5-14 years are currently working, although this number could be under-estimated as young people participate in a variety of tasks for family survival (National Population Commission Secretariat, 2007b). A study by Jones and Chant (2009) found many young women spend up to four hours a day in a combination of paid and unpaid labour which can take significant time away from homework and their leisure time (Jones & Chant, 2009). In the process of employment and financing the family, young women can become exposed to the dangers of illegal work including prostitution. With few jobs available for those with little or no education some turn to prostitution as a means for a better way of life (TANGO, 2001).

There are also difficulties for many women. Women form a large proportion of the unskilled and informal work force. Many women are engaged in fruit and vegetable production which holds the greatest potential for the provision of additional sources of food and income for the family (Sanyang *et al*, 2009). Most women have had no access to education and do not have the necessary qualifications to secure a job in the formal sector. As a consequence, women are grossly under-represented in the formal sector (Dibba, 2007). In the formal sector, women's access to employment is limited in terms of obtaining a job in the first place, staying in employment and making it to the top.

### ***The formal work sector***

With an increase in the number of young people attending school until senior secondary school level, the growth in the job market is not keeping pace with the high turnover of school leavers; as a result there is high youth unemployment. Unemployment rates are particularly high among young people aged 20-24 years. It is estimated that 29.12% of males and 26.93% of females are unemployed (National Population Commission Secretariat, 2007b). Although these are official unemployment rates, if these people did not participate in any type of work they would not survive, therefore they have to participate in some form of informal work. Similarly to what Ansell (2004) found in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, young people in The Gambia often enter secondary school with the aspiration of future formal employment. Table 3.3 shows the number of young people aged 15-24 years who either are in education, in employment or are unemployed.

**Table 3.3: Young People in Education, Employed and Unemployed**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Only in Education</b>	<b>Only in Employment</b>	<b>Unemployed and inactive</b>
<b>15</b>	49.9	22.2	34.8
<b>16</b>	46.9	25	26.7
<b>17</b>	43	30.7	28.2
<b>18</b>	32.8	34.2	33.4
<b>19</b>	26.3	38.5	36.8
<b>20</b>	18	45	37.1
<b>21</b>	17.3	42.9	42.4
<b>22</b>	11.6	48	39.3
<b>23</b>	6	47.5	45.9
<b>24</b>	8.3	52.4	41.2

(Source: Adapted from Table 14 'Time use patterns by various background characteristics, 15-24 years age group', Guarcello *et al*, 2005: 40).

Table 3.3 shows understandably, the number of young people in education decreases as age increases. The older age groups are more likely to be unemployed or inactive compared to their younger cohorts. This implies that even with further education, young people find it difficult to find employment. However, the data also shows that many young people are employed. This number increases as young people become older and move from school to work.

Western style schools are seen as offering the possibility of better employment opportunities (Okuma, 2005). Education is seen as being influential in gaining formal employment. The future returns and perceived economic benefits are important factors associated with parents' choice of formal schooling. However, the upper basic school and senior secondary school curriculum have been criticised in the current Education Policy for not providing young people with the necessary skills for future formal employment (DOSBSE, 2006). With a poor quality curriculum some students are only gaining enough knowledge and skills to enter the informal sector (Nystram, 2003). This offers parents little incentive to send their children to senior secondary school as there are in reality few additional economic benefits.

## **Sexual and Reproductive Knowledge and Behaviour**

Sexual and reproductive health knowledge and behaviour have been incorporated into the National Youth Policy and the National Women's Policy. Both are concerned with matters of contraception, family planning, STIs and reproductive health. Part of the Gambia's Family Planning Association (GFPA) Strategic Plan for 2005-2009 was to, "promote sexual and reproductive health and rights including family planning and fight against HIV/AIDS through advocacy, counselling, behaviour change communication and the provision of health care" (GFPA, 2005, p.7). This plan includes a social marketing programme currently marketing condoms for protection from pregnancy and HIV. This programme has been media centred with billboards, poster and radio campaigns across the country.

The findings of an Adolescent and Youth survey in 2000 involving young people aged 14-24 years showed sexual activity was prevalent among young people and 41.5% had experienced sexual relationships at least once by the age of 19 years (Republic of The Gambia, 2000). Even though there have been national campaigns in regards to contraception the use of contraception still remains low at 18% (UNICEF, 2009). Knowledge of STIs including HIV/AIDS is also low with studies showing only 39% of females aged 15-24 have comprehensive knowledge about HIV (UNICEF, 2009).

The health of young people is greatly affected not only by the provision of adequate reproductive and sexual health services but also by factors outside the control of the health system such as religious and socio-cultural issues and values. Notions of tradition, culture, family and religion remain influential in constructing lived experiences of sexuality in The Gambia (Touray, 2006). At the level of the family, the attitudes of many parents indicate they are not open to discussion on sexual or reproductive health because of their general lack of knowledge and self-confidence, but also because of cultural restrictions. This has created barriers for young people accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services, or even getting involved in various sexual and reproductive health activities (Touray, 2006).

Increased mobility and exposure to foreign lifestyles is leading to an erosion of traditional cultural values, which may contribute to the decrease in the age of first sexual encounter (M'Bye, 2005). The desire for some to have 'Western' lifestyles has resulted in the commercial sexual exploitation of some young people through sex

tourism. A report by UNICEF (2003b) indicates the incidence of sex tourism is increasing. The main legislation introduced to overcome this problem includes the Tourism Offences Act<sup>8</sup> 2003 and the Children's Act 2005 making it illegal. Young people involved may be from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, may have dropped out of school or have migrated from rural areas (UNICEF, 2003b).

### ***School: Family-life education and sexual harassment***

Aside from national poster and billboard campaigns students are taught sexual and reproductive knowledge through the school curriculum. A programme titled Population and Family Life Education (POP/FLE) teaches various subjects in an attempt to prepare young people for adulthood. The programme is designed to assist young people in their physical, social, emotional and moral development as they prepare for adulthood, marriage and parenthood, social relationships and work (Ministry of Education, 1997). This programme also includes teaching students HIV transmission and prevention. However, only 32.6% of schools across the country provided life-skills based education in the academic year 2007 (Republic of The Gambia, 2008b).

The scope and extent of sexual harassment in schools across the country remains unclear. However, female pupils who claimed, in a report on teenage pregnancy, that they had reported sexual harassment professed little was done about their claim (Republic of The Gambia & UNICEF, 2000). The Department of State for Education, in collaboration with other stakeholders, has developed a sexual harassment policy. This maintains sexual harassment of a student, teacher or any other member of staff, within the educational system, is intolerable (M'Bye, 2005). Although a policy has been mentioned to allow young women to return to school after pregnancy, this had not been put into practice at the time of the research.

### **Initiation Ceremonies: 'Circumcision', Seclusion and Celebration**

Female 'circumcision' is deeply rooted in the cultural and traditional life of Gambian women. The estimated percentage of all women in The Gambia who have undergone 'circumcision' varies from 60-90% (BAFROW, 2006). As discussed in the previous chapter female 'circumcision' in The Gambia varies between ethnic groups

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<sup>8</sup> While tourism has become a source of employment and contributed to foreign exchange there have been some consequences, for example, sex tourism. The Tourism Offences Act (2003) has been put in place to protect young people from potential sexual advances from tourists (UNICEF, 2008).

and regional variations. The ethnic and geographic origin of these ethnic groups is highly relevant to the prevalence and type of 'circumcision' practiced in their community (National Women's Bureau, 2002). There is currently no nationwide study documenting the prevalence, types and practice of female 'circumcision' but it is estimated that the practice among the Serehules and Mandinkas is 100%, Jola 96%, Fulas 84% and Sere 64% (National Women's Bureau, 2002). These disparate figures make it difficult to estimate the national prevalence rate. The practice is most prevalent in rural areas with the reasons for its continuation varying from one ethnic group to another and from one area to another (GAMCOTRAP, 2007). The practice occurs at different ages depending on the young woman's ethnic group. Almost all Mandinkas, the largest ethnic group practice on young women aged 4-12 years old, Jolas practice on young women between 10-15 years old, the Serehules one week after birth and the Fulas between one week and 18 years old (BAFROW, 2006: 1; National Women's Bureau, 2002: 5). This age difference affects the way the practice is viewed. Female 'circumcision' can be seen as a rite of passage to womanhood for Mandinkas and Jolas, but for Serehules the procedure is performed at such a young age that it is not an initiation (BAFROW, 2006). Reasons for 'circumcision' include religion, tradition, social pressure and culture. It is performed to reduce the sexual desire of women, to prepare young women for adulthood and to prevent young women from engaging in pre-marital sexual relations (Dibba, 2007). Gambians more generally draw attention to the relationship between female 'circumcision' and ethnicity, religion and the maintenance of tradition and culture (Hernlund, 2000).

There are three elements of initiation, including the genital cutting, the seclusion period and the celebration. The initiation involves shaping of the female body and the female person through genital cutting and training during the weeks of seclusion (Skramstad, 2008). The ritual is supposed to make young women ready to become married women and mothers, but does not bring any immediate changes apart from a status as initiated, and access to other initiation rituals. During the seclusion and healing period young women are trained about valued qualities in women such as respect, obedience, endurance and privacy and also learn practical skills, songs and dances (Skramstad, 2008). At the end of the seclusion period a celebration ceremony is held. This marks the reintegration back into the community into a different position from what they had before (Skramstad, 2008).

### ***Restructuring the practice***

Currently The Gambia has not passed a law against the practice nor does the government appear to intend to (Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, 2007). The Children's Act section 19 states, "no child shall be subjected to any social and cultural practices that affect the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular those customs and practices that are prejudicial to the health and life of the child and discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status"(p.21). Although female 'circumcision' is not mentioned in any policies or laws there have been campaigns against the practice. Initially in 1997 radio and television campaigns received hostility from the government which banned the broadcasting of anti-female 'circumcision' material, although this ban was lifted a few months later (Morrison *et al*, 2001). As in other sub-Saharan African countries, the campaign in The Gambia has primarily focused on the health risk to women (Hernlund, 2000). Health-based interventions have had some success in breaking the culture of silence surrounding the practice but they have not resulted in large-scale behaviour change. In some communities women were found to be already aware of the many potential health risks. However, they weighed these risks against the perceived social benefits (Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, 2007).

Research has shown female 'circumcision' is not necessarily practised in the same ways it was before. There is a tendency to circumcise at younger ages, resulting in young women being less able to comprehend the nature of the experience (Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, 2007). With this decrease in age, young women do not learn, nor are they trained, in the qualities and values that are deemed necessary for womanhood. A study by Hernlund (2000), explores some of the reasons why there has been a change in the practice. This includes parents' fear that a law will be passed making the practice illegal; this can result in some communities seeking to circumcise all young women before it is too late<sup>9</sup>. Another reason is that younger girls are seen as less capable of fighting back (Hernlund, 2000).

In recent years it has become increasingly common for young women to undergo a primarily physical procedure with little or no accompanying ritual (Skramstad, 2008). Reasons for the removal of the ritual include the expense of the

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<sup>9</sup> Female circumcision has been banned in neighbouring Senegal since 1999, which could be a reason why Gambian women are nervous that it could also be banned in The Gambia (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2001).



celebrations, schoolgirls circumcised during holidays have to return to school and thus have no time for lengthy seclusion and, in a few cases, young women are taken against their will with no understanding of the practice (Hernlund, 2000). In response to the increasing pattern of ‘cutting without ritual’ some Gambian women have developed a project focused on ‘ritual without cutting’ (Hernlund, 2000). Activists against female circumcision have attempted to operate within culturally appropriate boundaries by opposing just the genital cutting of the practice. Since 1996 BAFROW has encouraged communities to hold rituals to teach and train girls’ values important to womanhood. They have created a programme on restructuring the rites of passage. The programme has been developed and translated into three main languages, Mandinka, Jola and Fula and includes aspects of health, culture and religion (BAFROW, 2006). When children are 6-7 years old they will go through the ‘new passage’ (GAMCOTRAP, 2005). GAMCOTRAP claim to have been successful in their ‘drop the knife’ campaign. Firstly circumcisers are sensitised about the dangers of cutting and are then trained and transformed into community health workers and key trainers for the programme of ritual without cutting. At the ceremony the ex-circumcisers openly declare they have ceased the practice by reciting an oath. They are then presented with a certificate followed by a celebration (GAMCOTRAP, 2007). The numbers of circumcisers involved in this campaign is currently very low and the campaign may become difficult to sustain throughout the country.

### **Marriage: Legal versus Socio-Cultural**

The lives of young women are controlled by social and cultural conceptions of womanhood, including recognising womanhood through marriage and fertility. In The Gambia four types of marriage are recognised: customary, Sharia (Islamic), registry/civil and Christian. Constitutional law covers the latter two. The constitution states that all marriages shall be based on the free and full consent of the intended parties. Marriage under customary law varies considerably between regions, ethnic groups and even families. The majority of marriages are performed under Islamic law as a large proportion of the population are Muslim. The legal age of marriage is 16 years but under Islamic law young women aged 14 are allowed to marry. The Children’s Act 2005 places marriage under ‘protection rights’, and Article 24 states, “subject to provisions of any applicable personal law no child is capable of contracting a valid marriage and a marriage so contracted is voidable” (p.24).

Traditionally parents choose the marital partner of daughters but this has gradually started to change, partly due to their daughters increase in education. Parents believe that their choice of a husband for their daughter is the best as they look at the family background of the man, his reputation and his attitudes, which they believe that a girl in love will not be able to see (GAMCOTRAP, 2007). Once a young woman has received an education, parents fear that they will not be able to choose their daughters' marriage partner. This is particularly significant for young women and is said to be one of the main reasons for their low enrolment and withdrawal from education (Government of The Gambia & UNICEF, 2001).

It is also a customary practice to promise young women as potential wives; this can lead to early and forced marriages. Early, arranged, forced marriage and child betrothal are common even though the Children's Act 2005 states the prohibition of child betrothal. For example, in Article 25 of the act, "no guardian or any other person shall betroth a child to any person, make the child the subject of a dowry transaction or give out a child in marriage" (p.25). In The Gambia the percentage of young women aged 20-24 years who were married before 18 years old was estimated at 36% (urban areas 24% and rural areas 45%) (UNICEF, 2009). Although early marriage practices are uncommon in urban areas, it is common for young women to be given away in marriage in rural areas. Reasons for this practice include to prevent pre-marital pregnancy and child bearing, to ensure virginity before marriage, to strengthen relationships or friendships between families, to establish a family before one dies and the desire for money in exchange for daughters (Dibba, 2007). When a young woman reaches a certain age she is obliged to marry the man to whom she was promised to at birth or infancy or face the penalty of being rejected by her parents. Some young women run away from home and there have been cases of young women trying to commit suicide (GAMCOTRAP, 2007). By increasing the number of young women in school it is hoped this will reduce the incidence of early and forced marriage.

### **Childbearing**

Women are valued for their fertility and it is desirable for newly married young women to begin to reproduce soon after marriage. The ultimate test of womanhood is the number of children a woman produces for her husband's family (Government of The Gambia & UNICEF, 2001). The arrival of the first child for the new wife is a part of the social integration into her husband's family. There is

preference for a boy child as a son will carry the family name and stay in the family whereas a girl will be married into another family (Skramstad, 2008). The desire for a large family is still high because of the economic and social value attached to children: the total fertility rate is 4.8 births per woman (UNICEF, 2009). The majority of women have little control over their fertility and many face opposition from their husbands in matters of family planning for birth spacing or limiting the number of pregnancies (Dibba, 2007).

Parents and elders try to keep children ignorant of their sexuality until they get married to prevent pre-marital pregnancy and child bearing. There are widely held traditional beliefs that sexual abstention before marriage, early marriage and fidelity in marriage are important factors for the morality of women (UNICEF, 2003). Some parents believe that educating a young woman is unnecessary, as she should be trained at home in domestic responsibilities to make a good wife and mother. However, early pregnancy both in and out of marriage can lead to reproductive health risks.

### ***Teenage pregnancy, illegal abortions and baby abandonment***

If a young woman becomes pregnant whilst at school she will normally have to drop out and usually will not return. Currently there is no legislation in place making it unlawful to dismiss young women or keep them away from school because of pregnancy. In the case of abortion and child abandonment the actual or perceived rejection by the baby's father and her own family may compel unmarried young women to commit such acts (Government of The Gambia & UNICEF, 2001). In The Gambia abortion is only legal on three counts: when pregnancy poses a threat to the life of the mother; in the case of rape; and when the mother is mentally unbalanced. Currently there are no studies on the profiles of women who have had abortions in terms of their age, socio-economic and educational level. The incidence of baby abandonment, or as the media has termed, 'baby dumping' is steadily rising. In the worst cases newly born babies are dumped in pit latrines or other isolated places and left to die but generally they are wrapped in a cloth and left in a place where they can be found. Between 1994 and 2000 there were 62 reported cases of baby abandonment but there may be many more cases that go unreported (TANGO, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the background to The Gambia by exploring the laws and policies relating to young people and women. However, the enforcement of laws is inhibited by social norms and cultural practices. One of the main factors that construct the effective protection of human rights, particularly for women and children, is the dominance of customary and religious law which can be discriminatory and condone harmful practices towards women. Impeding the awareness of their rights is the low education status of women. The Gambia has focused its efforts on girls' education through various campaigns and programmes such as the Scholarship Trust Fund and the PEGEP. These programmes have addressed needs for young women such as cost, perceived irrelevance, cultural factors, distance to schools and protection within schools.

The chapter then examined the transitions to womanhood and the impact of education on the transitions. With the improvement in achieving education for girls, this has challenged the traditional transitions. Education has created alternative paths to womanhood. Young people are involved in domestic responsibilities and experience the gender divisions of labour from a very early age. Women train their daughters in domestic responsibilities to be able to look after their own family when they are married. Girls and women carry out the bulk of domestic work and this has implications for education and leisure time. Schooling has created a double burden for young people, of participating in work but still having the same amount of domestic responsibilities. In terms of work, young people can be involved in informal sector work from an early age and the majority of women will remain in the informal sector. Womanhood status is not recognised by work as it can be performed from an early age. Education is thought to be important to gain access to formal employment, however, the quality of education and a high unemployment rate of young people has denied many entering this sector.

Young people are affected by the provision and access to sexual and reproductive services but social and cultural factors create barriers to information. The school curriculum has attempted to bridge the gap of incorrect knowledge by adopting the POP/FLE programme. Traditionally young women were taught about sexual matters through initiation, which may include female 'circumcision'. There are no national laws against this practice despite nationwide campaigns. There have been attempts to restructure the practice through a programme a ritual without cutting.

Islamic law, particularly in regards to marriage, divorce and inheritance, mainly governs women. Women are highly valued as wives and mothers often resulting in early and forced marriage. Soon after marriage young women are expected to begin childbearing. Many young women have little control over it in terms of access to family planning and contraception. It is thought that education will have a positive affect on marriage by lengthening the number of years before a young woman becomes a wife. In terms of childbearing, education is believed to delay conception. However, young women in school may be subjected to sexual abuse which can lead to teenage pregnancy resulting in young women dropping out of school, illegal abortions or baby abandonment.

## Chapter Four

# Methodology

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### **Introduction**

This chapter will explore the research approach adopted, methods used with young people and the research process including the research methods used and the research participants in The Gambia. The chapter focuses on some of the practicalities of conducting research with young people and the methods to use with them. The study used qualitative methods including focus groups, narratives, visual and task-based activities and interviews and all these will be evaluated. Following on the ethics involved in this study will be analysed and issues of informed consent, confidentiality and positionality will be examined. Finally limitations to the study and the analysis of the results will be explored.

### **Research Approach Adopted**

A child-centred approach was adopted to the research process. Previous research has explored young people as objects of research, rarely letting young people speak for themselves (Barker & Weller, 2003). The lives of young people have often been examined through the voices of adults. With the adoption of the social approach to childhood, more recent research has adopted the principle that children as social actors are able to speak for themselves about their own experiences (Baker & Weller, 2003). To obtain the voices from the young people researchers have to understand young people in their social contexts, rather than separate them from other groups in society (Bourdillon, 2004). It was important for this study and to the researcher that the opinions and experiences of the research participants could be expressed freely. Adult researchers need to engage with children's cultures and social worlds in order to represent their views as accurately as possible (Holt, 2004). In order to achieve the opinions of young people it was important for the researcher to explore the methods that have been used with young people.

### ***Methods with young people***

Increasing numbers of researchers have adopted qualitative methods and have become committed to an interest in young people as subjects, understanding their

lived experiences and how they interpret these experiences (Hill, 2006: 72; Sime, 2008: 63). Childhood researchers have experimented with a variety of child-orientated methods. In practical terms an over reliance on one type of data collection method can lead to biases (Morrow, 2008). Using a diverse collection of methods allows young people to express themselves through a variety of ways (Christensen, 2004). This allows differing groups of young people to choose their own suitable method of outlet for their own points of view. Different and multiple methods help to account for young people's different life experiences and competencies (Punch, 2002). Apart from creating a detailed account of young people's experiences, these methods help to establish trust and rapport with participants. These innovative methods designed for young people have, however been criticised as being patronising, separating them from adults (Punch, 2002). The challenge is to balance between not patronising young people, and recognising their competencies while maintaining their interest and keeping them relevant to them (Punch, 2002). There have been debates surrounding the extent to which research with young people is different from research with adults. Christiansen (2004) argues that there is no reason to apply different principles to research involving young people or to assume that a different set of ethical standards is needed.

One way of involving young people has been through participatory research (PR). At the centre of PR is a movement away from traditional research concepts by involving the researched in some or all stages of the research process from problem definition to dissemination (Beazley 2006: 191; Sime, 2008: 63). This research was termed participatory, as respondents were not involved in research design but aided in identifying important and relevant points of discussions (Van Blerk, 2006). It did however, aim to take some aspects of PR such as generating information from young people's differing perspectives rather than the perspectives of the adult researcher (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Participatory methods use a wide range of techniques brought together by a common concern for actively involving research subjects (Gallagher, 2008). This helps participants to produce knowledge about themselves. PR has introduced methodological development such as participatory diagramming, which have been designed to produce layered accounts and local knowledge. These methods have also been useful to overcome barriers of culture, literacy and disability (Pain, 2004). The emphasis on generating knowledge from the perspective of those being researched has become important when researching young people.

## **The Research Process in The Gambia**

Chapter Three discussed The Gambia's success in increasing the enrolment rate of girls in schools at all levels. The chapter illustrated the high level of drop-out rates for girls after primary education and during secondary education. The data also showed there were a number of girls who have never been to school. The researcher therefore chose education as the criterion for participant identification. The fieldwork stage was conducted over a ten-month period in Greater Banjul. Four groups of participants were involved in the research including girls 'in school', 'recently left school', those 'dropped out of school'<sup>10</sup>, and girls who had 'never been to school'. In addition, mothers of daughters were also included.

The research was conducted in four stages and used a qualitative multi-method approach. This enabled young people to express themselves in a range of ways. The research design also attempts to draw on a diversity of methods and techniques to provide rich, detailed and lived experiences from the perspectives of those researched. Qualitative methods provide an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, enabling the researcher to discover some of the reasons why people behave the way they do (Torstenson, 2007). The advantages of using qualitative methods include the ability to gain an insight into research participants' lives by learning about their attitudes, behaviours, value systems, motivations, cultures and lifestyle (Mayoux, 2006). Using complementary multiple methods enables researchers to combine and crosscheck information from participants which are important to the particular research questions (Mayoux, 2006). The first stage involved interviews with key informants; the second stage centred on focus group discussions with participants 'in school'; the third stage involved in-depth narratives with respondents from all participant groups; and the fourth stage involved collecting narratives from mothers. The methods needed to be flexible, in case some were not feasible, and so they could be adapted to suit the change in the research focus. Appendix I shows the methods used with each group of participants, the length of time involved and what was involved.

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<sup>10</sup> Research participants who had 'dropped out of school' included those who were currently enrolled in a skills training centre but had not completed either their primary or upper basic level of education. This is because this group of girls were very hard to access. It is important to note that there is also a hard to reach group of girls who have dropped out of school who are not attending skills training centres but may be married, currently employed or stay at home.



### *Stage One*

The first phase of this research was to carry out semi-structured interviews with key informants who were selected because of their professional capacities. Twelve key informants were interviewed. These included key personnel from the Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education (DOSBSE), UNICEF, the Women's Bureau, the Forum of African Women Educationalist Gambia Chapter (FAWEGAM), teachers at schools, teachers at skills centres, the New World for Youth Centre (NWYC), the Association for Promoting Girls and Women's Advancement (APGWA), BAFROW and The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP). Key personnel were located through the snowballing technique. This technique allows the researcher to be informed of organisations they would not always know about and names of people who would be useful to talk to. However, some respondents may not inform the researcher of certain potential informants because they may give undesirable information. It is important to be aware of interview bias and 'social desirability' so as not to influence responses. This occurs when the participants do not answer the questions or activities honestly because they perceive the truth to be socially unacceptable or undesirable (Willis, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were used allowing key informants to speak for themselves about their own views and experiences (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). Interviews were used to generate information from key informants to find out about how particular policies were devised or how groups have responded to certain initiatives (Willis, 2006). These interviews explored the policies, responses to the policies and collective views of the organisation surrounding the key themes of the study, notably transitions to adulthood and womanhood. Discussions with the key professionals from the Education Department and organisations involved with education covered enrolment and drop-out rates, the content of the school curriculum, retention, constraints girls face in school, the impact of combining schooling and paid and/or domestic work and the impact of an education on girls' future choices in employment. Some interviews with organisations focused on social and cultural practices marking the transition to womanhood and the prevalence of these practices, including marriage, female 'circumcision' and the restructuring of the female rites-of-passage. Interviews with youth organisations investigated programmes designed for young people, the challenges girls face in society, at school and at home, and the life skills

that are important for adulthood. From the meetings with these organisations various internal reports and documents were made available to the researcher.

When accessing key informants the researcher notified them of the research aims and objectives, their involvement in the study and assured them of confidentiality in the analysis before acquiring informed consent. Whenever possible, interviews were tape recorded with consent from the interviewees. However, this was not always possible due to noise from the surrounding environment, such as air-conditioning units and traffic. Direct recording allowed the researcher to concentrate on the interview without having to take long notes but also allows the researcher to replay and check the details of the interview (Willis, 2006). The researcher often felt the power imbalances in favour of the key informant when conducting interviews. To help overcome the situation the researcher read detailed accounts surrounding the topics to be discussed and wrote down a semi-structured format of questions.

### ***Stage Two***

The second stage involved carrying out a series of three focus group discussions: two at the selected upper basic school and one at the senior secondary school. Only one focus group was conducted at the senior secondary school because of time limitations as the school was preparing for exams. At the upper basic school a total of 20 girls aged from 13-16 years took part, with 10 girls in each group. All the girls were from grade 8 and were selected by the head-teacher. At the senior secondary school ten girls from grade 11 took part, their ages ranging from 16-18 years<sup>11</sup>; these girls were also selected by the head-teacher. Each focus group discussion lasted over a period of four weeks, one to two hours per session. Focus groups were conducted in English. Due to time limitations and logistical problems focus group discussions could not be held with participants at the skills centres or participants who have 'never been to school'. The head-teacher at one of the skills centre was willing for her students to take part in the research but it had to take place over a limited period of weeks because of exams. Due to the variety of locations for participants who have 'never been to school', it was difficult to find a time and place where all participants could meet at one time.

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<sup>11</sup> There was some variation in age of girls within grades at each of the participating schools because some started late at school due to the cost or because they attended Madrassa or they had to repeat a grade.

Focus groups are commonly used to gather information on collective views of particular groups of people in society (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). During focus group discussions participants were able to consider a range of topics, often generating similar and contradicting ideas from each other. The aim of the focus groups was to explore the themes of 'girlhood' and 'womanhood'. The researcher wanted to include the participants to discuss themes that were important to them. Focus groups were flexible allowing the researcher to add or modify questions, while the participants chose their level of involvement (Longsford & McDonagh, 2003). Focus group discussions enabled participants to build on the responses and ideas of others, promote information sharing, and supply the researcher with a varied account of lived experiences of young people (Longsford & McDonagh, 2003).

The disadvantages of focus groups include that some young people may feel pressured by other members of the group to give answers, not only what the researcher wants to hear, but also the other participants. In particular, peer pressure discourages students from expressing unconventional opinions (Ansell, 2001). This creates unequal power balances amongst the participants (Pain & Francis, 2003). It was therefore important to point out that each person should respect the views of others, there should be no interrupting and everyone has the right to express an opinion (Matthews *et al*, 1998b). On occasions one or two people dominated discussions. When this happened the researcher asked other members if they had anything to say on the topic. These discussions provided the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the topic, thereby generating further questions for additional discussions. The topics raised included challenges that girls and women face in society, the stages of childhood and adulthood, the impact of education on girlhood and traditional and cultural practices that affect girls.

To help facilitate the discussions visual and task based activities were also used including spider diagrams, timelines and 'cause and effect' diagrams. Visual and task-based activities have proven to be useful in undertaking research with marginalised groups who are often living in cultures very different from those of researchers and in producing robust, good quality data in an ethical way (Pain & Francis, 2003). In focus groups, visual and task-based activities assist the contribution of less dominant participants and help them to express a voice (Kesby, 2000). Spider diagrams were used to illustrate the challenges girls and women face in society, while timelines were used to show important age related life events. When creating 'cause

and effect' diagrams the researcher raised topics regarding cultural practices, such as early marriage and female circumcision. The participants would then discuss and write down the causes and effects of each of these practices. Daily schedules and timelines can be used to plot a wide range of activities or experiences in societies that changes over time (Kesby, 2000), while spider diagrams can be used as a brainstorming technique which avoids imposing adult defined categories (Punch, 2002).

Before the research could take place in the schools, the researcher asked permission from the head-teachers by informing them of the research and the potential involvement of some of the students. Each of the head-teachers provided additional consent for the participants to take part. Allowing head-teachers to choose the participants can lead to bias, as head-teachers are likely to choose their 'best' students and they could choose students they believe would give the answers the researcher wants to hear. All potential participants were grouped together at each school; the researcher then informed the participants of their involvement and the importance of gaining consent from parents or guardians. Participants were given an information sheet detailing the scope of the research, their involvement and any activities they would be engaged in.

### ***Stage Three***

The third stage of the research was to follow up on the focus group discussions with in-depth interviews and narratives with girls and young women. These were different participants from those who completed the focus group discussions because the head-teachers were concerned with the amount of time taken out of the school timetable. In total 60 participants were involved with the narrative part of the research process. Their ages ranged from 13 years to 25 years.

Of the two schools chosen, one was an upper basic school and the other one was a senior secondary school; both located in Greater Banjul<sup>12</sup>. Eleven students were from the upper basic school and twelve students were selected at the senior secondary school. The upper basic school is a government school, whilst the senior secondary school is a private school. At the upper basic school, girls in grade 8 took part and from the senior secondary school, girls from grade 11 took part in the research. These

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<sup>12</sup> The decision was taken to use two levels of schooling to contrast the experiences of two different age groups and their views on education.

two grades were chosen as students would not be preparing for exams. At both of the schools the head-teacher selected the students. The participants who had ‘recently left school’, included two who were at a skills training centre and one who, at the time of the study, was working in a restaurant.

Consultation with organisations working in the field of female education informed the researcher of skills training centres for girls who ‘dropped out of school’. A large proportion of girls and young women attending these centres had ‘dropped out of school’ for a number of reasons, including cost of formal schooling, pregnancy and poor academic performance in school. In total 22 young women who had ‘dropped out of school’ took part, with ages ranging from 16 years to 25 years. Two skills training centres were chosen and both were located within Greater Banjul. Although the two skills training centres taught similar courses, skill training centre one was better provided with teachers and equipment than the second, but this resulted in higher fees. The majority of the girls attending this centre were sponsored by NGOs. The girls at both skills training centres were selected on a voluntary basis. The head-teachers were informed of the research aims and what the research process would involve. Once the researcher had negotiated with the head-teachers, the researcher was invited to talk to the potential participants.

In total twelve young women who had ‘never been to school’ took part, their ages ranging from 15 years to 25 years. They were from two districts, Fajikunda and Latrikunda within Serrekunda, the largest urban settlement in The Gambia, both located in Greater Banjul. These areas were chosen because they were the districts in which the research assistants lived and they therefore knew of young women who had ‘never been to school’. Narratives with the participants were held at their homes. Choosing the home as a research site has increased advantages as the home may be perceived as personal and familiar (Sime, 2008). As with schools, homes are not entirely controlled by young people and not all young people will feel they have a voice at home. The home, for some young people, is not a safe place and they may be restricted in their participation. Researching in the home environment means every interview setting is different and cannot be managed in the same way as other research settings such as schools or youth clubs (Bushin, 2007). The research assistants approached the young women to see if they would like to take part in the research. If they were interested, the researcher would then meet with the potential

participant to inform them of the aims of the research and obtain consent. Further information about the research assistants will be explored in stage four of this chapter.

It was important for the researcher to establish trust and rapport with all research participants. In order to do this narratives and task-based activities were used with all the participants. Narratives allow the researcher to develop this trust with the sharing of information. Narratives seek to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives and can help to chart the changes that have taken place over time in a particular society (Roberts, 2002). They can be used to explore how individuals' life experiences can be understood within their cultural and social settings. Narratives allow an interest in people and have the effect of humanising the research; this enabled the researcher to get to know the research participant and to ask relevant questions (Kakuru & Paradza, 2007). Narratives allowed flexibility, in-depth exploration and helped to explore life events by creating insights into the participants' experiences (Kakuru & Paradza, 2007). They have had success in gathering information on the lives of people who lack power and whose opinions are seldom sought, such as women and young people. By letting young people talk about their lives, the researcher could generate a description of their own development and the social and cultural contexts in which they have lived. A narrative approach used with young people can provide a meaningful story about the individual (Torstenson, 2007).

The disadvantage associated with narratives is the reliance on participants' memories. Questions of reliability and validity and inconsistencies with memory have figured extensively in discussions of the biography method (Roberts, 2002). Memory is an important aspect as it creates meaning out of life experiences. A person remembers what has been meaningful to them, and even if the narration is partly not true, it can illustrate how a person has experienced their life events (Torstenson, 2007). In telling their narratives participants sometimes failed to talk about certain areas that the researcher considered important to their research. To alleviate this, the researcher kept a list of probing questions to guide the narratives (Kakuru & Paradza, 2007). A further disadvantage included participants giving the answers they think the researcher wants to hear.

The narratives were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the researcher and the participant meeting once a week over a period of three weeks for one to two hours per session. During the first meeting their childhood experiences and what it means to

them to be a 'girl' were explored. During the second session the themes focused on education, their role within the family, workloads, family expectations and future aspirations. The final session explored sexuality and rites of passage such as initiation, female 'circumcision' and marriage. Each of the young women from the participant groups took part in all of the meetings, although some of the questions were adapted to suit the different groups. A translator was used to help with young women who had 'never been to school'.

In the first meeting the participants were asked to complete a 24-hour clock of their typical day and complete a timeline of their life experiences and any future plans and aspirations. These were then used during the remainder of the talks to promote discussion. Visual and task-based activities can be used with individual young people or in focus group discussions. In the interview process visual and task-based activities helped to break up the interviews and make them more varied and interesting both for the researcher and the young person. As young people tend not to be as likely as adults to give long answers to open-ended questions, visual materials enabled them to expand their responses (Punch, 2002). Diagrams can be used as visual aids on which to build information and elicit more in-depth information. The results from using visual and task-based activities could be immediately viewed by the participants and the researcher who then encouraged them to analyse and discuss these themselves (Kesby, 2000).

Recruiting young people to participate in research is a difficult stage of the research process because a number of gatekeepers including organisations, parents, caregivers and teachers tightly control the researchers' access to them (Powell & Smith, 2009). Bushin (2007) states, it is important not to see gatekeepers as being restrictive but as people with whom to negotiate and discuss. The researcher seeking access to young people encountered multiple layers of gate-keeping. It was important to be aware that some gate-keepers sometimes try to control over who the researcher talks to (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). In order to facilitate access to young people in school and in skills training centres a clear and systematic plan was used to explain to the head-teachers the underlying reason of the study, the participation of the school or skills training centre, the methods used, the concerns over the timetable and any other issues they raised. Any questions from the head-teachers were answered. When the head-teacher accepted, all the participants in the research were asked to sign a consent form before they could take part.

Once school and skills training centres gate-keepers had been satisfied the researcher encountered parental gate-keepers. Participants under 18 years old were given consent forms for their parents or guardians to sign or mark. A problem was encountered as to whether the parents or guardians would be able to read the consent form and sign their name. To overcome this problem the adults put a thumbprint, a mark to show their consent or to record their acceptance on tape, after the form had been read to them and they acknowledged understanding. Some participants were able to read the consent form to the parent or guardian. All participants were informed that if they did not get their parents permission they could not be included in the research.

#### *Stage Four*

The final stage of the research involved narratives with mothers of the young women involved in interviews. Narratives were used to establish if there had been any changes in the meaning of girlhood and womanhood. In total twelve mothers participated, including eight mothers of girls 'in school' or 'recently left school' and four mothers of girls who had 'never been to school'. No mothers of the girls 'dropped out of school' participated, due to issues brought up by the head-teachers of the skills training centres. These included the head-teachers believing the girls would not have time to assist the researcher in any further research and the perceived problems it could cause in their training. The mothers were selected by the researcher with permission from both the girls and their mothers. An additional consent form was used for the mothers of the groups of girls who took part in the discussions. A translator was used to read and explain the research to obtain consent.

Narratives were undertaken on a one-to-one basis at each of the mother's compound. Discussions involved the mothers telling the researcher about their childhoods, what they regard as the transition from girlhood to womanhood, what it means to be a 'girl' and a 'woman' and any changes that have taken place between their own childhood and that of their daughters, with particular regard to education. The narratives offered an opportunity to chart the ways in which girls' and women's experiences have changed by exploring the reasons for any changes and the timescale over which they are thought to have taken place. The researcher was aided by one of the research assistants to translate the discussions.

At certain times of the research, a research assistant was required to help with the translation. The researcher's inability to speak and understand the language was



certainly a limitation and this was most sharply highlighted when young people spoke to one another in focus group discussions. Translators were mainly for young women who had 'never been to school' and all groups of mothers. Two female Gambian research assistants aided the researcher and were from communities in which the study took place, reducing issues of outsider status. Using a translator can be a source of bias. It was therefore important for the translator to understand the importance of honesty. The researcher spent time with each of the research assistants to inform them of the nature of the research and the role they would take. The researcher informed them not to omit anything the participant said as all would be relevant to the study. Research assistants were able to gain access to potential participants and facilitate the researcher's acceptance into the community, especially if they are well known and trusted by the community (Leslie & Storey, 2003). However, when interviewing with a translator direct communication is limited between the researcher and participant, causing the conversation to be often irregular (Watson, 2003). Before conducting interviews with a translator it was important to semi-structure the interview, creating a basic pattern for both the researcher and the translator to know the order of the questions (Willis, 2006).

### **Ethics and Positionality**

Alderson (2004) identifies the need for researchers to continually reflect upon the ethics during the research in order to fully understand the changing circumstances of the research being undertaken. Adults have specific responsibilities towards young people to ensure they are not exploited in the research process (Bray & Gooskens, 2006: 45; Morrow, 2008: 54). In social research harm is generally more likely to involve psychological distress, discomfort, social disadvantage and invasion of privacy (Israel & Hay, 2006). Protecting young people has been reinforced by particular legal documents and policy, for example, the UNCRC. Although there has been considerable attention in protecting young people, less attention has been paid to the right of children to express their views freely in matters concerning them. For example, Article 12 of the UNCRC states, children should be given the right to express their views and have these views take into account in matters affecting them (Gallagher, 2008).

A challenge facing research on controversial and sensitive topics, such as cultural practices and sexuality, was gaining insight into the ways participants are

likely to perceive the research, and designing the research so sensitivities are minimised (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). Sexual behaviour is clearly highly personal in nature. It is also one of the areas of young people's behaviour in which adults make judgements and which they frequently try to control (Petrie *et al*, 2006). When conducting research with vulnerable groups it is important the researcher did not reinforce any feelings of low self-esteem, in particular with young people (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). To help overcome this problem the researcher established trust with each participant and participated in sharing their own information. The sharing of personal information is part of everyday interaction but in research it becomes a conscious act. It therefore became necessary to consider whether to share information and if so what information to share; both for the researcher and the researched. A build up of trust over a number of weeks allowed the sharing of more information (Limb & Dwyer, 2001).

### ***Informed consent***

Before starting any research the researcher obtained consent from all potential participants, making sure it was both informed and voluntary. The researcher treated securing consent as a gradual and emerging process, which had to be renegotiated at different stages (Israel & Hay, 2006). As the research took place over a number of weeks and involved increasingly sensitive discussions, participants were asked at each discussion whether they still agreed to participate. Participants were assured that they had the right to decline from participating and if they wanted to they could withdraw at any time and without any explanation with the understanding any information they had submitted would be removed. A problem when approaching potential participants, especially young people, is they often find it difficult to say no, as it is assumed that the adult has authority over them; it was therefore important to offer them the option of 'opting into' the research rather than 'opting out' (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). Informed consent from young people was necessary as it shows the process was not based on deception or coercion.

Participants could only make informed decisions if they had complete and thorough understanding of the research process (Scheyvens *et al*, 2003). The researcher provided the potential participants with information about the aims, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts and possible outcomes of the research, including whether and how results might be disseminated (Israel & Hay,

2006). One way of doing this was to provide participants with information sheets that provide an accessible overview of the research and the activities in which the participant would be involved. During this time the researcher provided an opportunity for the participants to ask questions (Scheyvens et al, 2003). It was important to ensure that the details of the research were explained at a level understandable to each group of young people, so that they could make an informed choice. Consent was obtained through the written word for the majority of participants, which required high levels of literacy. The researcher was aware of the potential problem with this method, for those who were illiterate information sheets were read aloud and consent was given through audio tape or thumb prints (Israel & Hay, 2006).

The notion of young people as competent social actors in the research process is reduced when it comes to the rules around consent (Skelton, 2008). Additional consent from parents, guardians or other gate-keepers has to be given for young people under 18 years before they can participate. This contradicts the new social studies of childhood, as additional consent implies young people are seen as less competent and are unable to make their own decisions. Regardless of children's abilities to make informed decisions adults also have obligations to their own children. Consent was gained from adult gate-keepers but it was important to ensure that young people decide for themselves whether to take part (Van Blerk, 2006).

### ***Confidentiality***

It was important participants were assured that any information generated was entirely confidential. In particular, as part of the narratives involved potentially discussing sensitive topics, it was necessary to assure the participants of the steps taken to ensure their confidentiality. Young people were guaranteed their views and opinions they expressed were in confidence, without prejudice, and without the fear of the researcher telling parents, guardians or other adults of the results (Matthews et al, 1998). Ethics guidelines recommend that the names of individuals and place names were not recorded and were disguised in the results to protect anonymity and confidentiality of respondents (Morrow, 2008).

To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity all field notes, tapes and transcripts were stored in a safe place and where possible they were stored electronically, accessed via a password. The researcher was prepared to destroy any

data if a participant changed their mind and they approached the researcher during or after the research and requested that it be withdrawn (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). Before recording any data from participants permission was gained from all young people, if in a focus group, or the individual if conducting interviews, and assurance was given that all transcriptions would be anonymous. It was important to be sensitive to those who did not want to be recorded. Participants also had the option to have any audio recording device turned off at any time. In order for participants to feel in control of the situation they had the ability to turn the tape recorder off at any time if they felt uncomfortable (Robson, 2001).

### *Positionality*

When conducting any research the power dynamics in the relationship between researcher and participants need to be observed. When engaging in research it was important to consider the researcher's identity and how it shaped interactions with participants (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). The immediate and obvious challenges in the lack of shared power include gender, ages, class, ethnicity, race, culture, education, sexuality and linguistic identities (Baker & Smith, 2001: 143; Robson, 2001: 138). It was important to recognise, when working in developing countries, the researcher has a privileged position in terms of wealth. Outsider status might include the ways less powerful groups and cultures have been represented by those in positions that are more powerful. For example, Westerners representing the experiences of people in developing countries maybe seen as unfairly biased (Beazley, 2006).

Conducting fieldwork as a young, white, developed world female researcher had an important impact upon the relationships established during the research (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). The researcher's outsider status such as nationality, ethnicity, attire and ability to engage in regular conversation created some gaps, however the researcher became accepted over time. There was a clear class difference, the researcher was from a former colonial country and an educated background which could put the researcher in one of hierarchy (Sultana, 2007). There were also visual and physical signs of difference in the researcher's outward appearance, which can also affect the power gradient; however, some things cannot be controlled such as size, sex and skin colour. Other aspects of physical appearance could be controlled such as the way the researcher dressed, their general appearance and their body

language (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). The researcher's outsider status is also reflected in terms of being an adult and their own childhood was different from those participating.

Being considered as an outsider in national socio-cultural terms placed the researcher in an ideal position to create a platform for the participants to describe their experiences and attitudes. As the researcher was a stranger, participants felt able to speak of both positive and negative experiences of their culture without fearing any reprisal. The researcher's outsider status allowed questions to be asked that may seem naïve or obvious to those being researched.

Participants were largely willing to talk freely and were very welcoming. Being a white, female researcher created curiosity and interest among other young people in the researched schools and skills training centres and when visiting participants in their homes. This often resulted in young people peering through classroom windows, young children following the researcher and people showing up to find out what was going on. There was a general acceptance of the researcher's presence and the researcher's outsider status (Sultana, 2007). The researcher's difference as an outsider was regularly commented upon and was intriguing to the young people. For example, due to gendered roles in The Gambia participants would often pass comment on the researcher's assumed (non) marital status and appearance. Being in my mid-twenties at this age most women in The Gambia are married with two or three children. The researcher was not married or a mother and this was a marked difference between the researcher and some of the participants. In Gambian culture marriage and childbearing are signs of womanhood, a mark of status, and the researcher having none of these things therefore did not have this status. Although this was commented upon after explaining the differences of marriage and childbearing attitudes in the West with participants they were willing to accept my status.

Researchers are often more powerful because the researcher's identities and characteristics influence the whole research process from the research questions to analysis and dissemination (Kakuru & Paradza, 2007). Young people are thought to be inherently vulnerable in research situations, owing to social and cultural notions of authority and power in their relationships with other adults in society (Bray & Gooskens, 2006). When researching young people, the researcher was presumed to be in a more powerful position and was conscious of this difference. The way the researcher interacted with the research participants, particularly the younger

participants helped in forming the relations of trust that are important in the fieldwork process. By using a multi-method approach the researcher was able to shift the power balance in favour the participants. Participants also made assumptions of the researcher's positionality. During one focus group discussion the participants thought that the findings would be reported to the head-teacher. The researcher therefore had to reassure them that all answers were confidential. Participants can be seen as having some power as they can withhold information, supply partial information and possibly dictate the way any research is conducted (Harrison, 2006). For example, there were several occasions when language made it difficult for the researcher to get involved in some of the conversations. When researching those with no education some participants expressed the view that they had little to contribute and would question why the researcher would want to talk to them. To overcome this problem the researcher would inform them that it was important for the researcher to gather a wide variety of views and experiences of many young people and that their views were valuable and important.

Power relations can work both ways, especially if the researcher is a young female in an overly patriarchal field context (Sultana, 2007). Female researchers may be perceived less threatening than males but may not be taken as seriously. The researcher was initially 'tested' in attempting to gain interviews with key informants. They did not refuse but would put the researcher off until later, cancel arrangements or postpone them. In particular, with key informant interviews, there were reverse power relations and these were obvious in the many rejections of meetings, disregarding of appointments previously granted, guarded responses and rushed interviews. The researcher dealt with these problems by trying to rearrange interviews to fit in with key informants, asked different questions around the same topic to see if answers were similar, asked about reports and data the researcher had previously read and in some cases arranged another interview.

### **Data Analysis**

With the rich data collected from all participants, it was important with the results to provide an explanation, understanding and interpretation to the participants involved in the research. The collected data and tape recordings were transcribed. Qualitative analysis allows a broad range of categories to be identified (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The narratives and discussions were analysed into themes, this

allowed ambiguities to be easily identified. In qualitative data analysis, researchers continuously modify how they treat the data to accommodate new data and new insights about the data (Sandelowski, 2000). The coding used to identify themes was often reworked and modified to allow new data to be included or excluded. The researcher was therefore able to distinguish patterns and relationships on which to base the findings. Similarities and differences in content and language were recognised and were coded. By coding data it allowed the information to be summarised numerically, by distinguishing how many respondents talked about a particular point but also allowing descriptive accounts of the information to be interpreted in the results (Sandelowski, 2000).

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is important to discuss the limitations of the research. The chapter has already explored the researcher's language limitations to engage with all research participants. The researcher is also aware of the limited data set. The data was collected from a relatively small number of young people and mothers, which means that the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population. The study was orientated around qualitative measures therefore the researcher was concerned with depth of the research collected rather than a large cohort of participants. The study was exclusively urban based which leads to bias. With more time, research with rural-based young women could have been studied. In particular, the limitations of access to education in rural areas, especially secondary schooling, would have created comparable data with urban-based young women. In order to achieve a better understanding of changes in transitions between mothers and daughters, the researcher would have to expand the numbers of mothers involved and spend further time with them. The researcher was also aware of potential bias through interpretation of the results as it is difficult to generalise the findings as each participant has unique experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how this thesis has focused upon on a child-centred approach to this research. It was important that the methods used in the research process would reflect the opinions and experiences of the participants. It was therefore key for the researcher to gather literature about the methods that would be useful to

gather rich and detailed data. The research was qualitative in nature and used multi-methods to collect the data. The chapter further examined how education was the important criterion for the research participants. How the researcher conducted the research in The Gambia were discussed into four stages. The methods utilised were examined and why the researcher chose those methods were explored. Focus group discussions, task-based activities and narratives were used in the process. Alongside these methods recruitment of participants and ethics were also analysed. Issues surrounding informed consent, confidentiality and positionality were all explored. Finally, how the data was analysed and the limitations of the research were examined.



## **Education, Domestic Roles and Work: Attitudes and Experiences**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter will explore and analyse the fieldwork results concerning education, domestic roles and responsibilities and work. These three transitions are grouped together as they represent the public and productive transitions that young people may pass through. The chapter will first explore participants' perceptions of education and how they believe education will make them become 'somebody'. The chapter will follow the structure of chapter two in relation to the transitions by first examining participants' domestic roles and responsibilities. This includes expected gender roles and assessing the effects of domestic work on education. Work transitions will then be explored including formal and informal sectors, the multiple burden and how education affects participants' work opportunities.

### **Perceptions of Education**

As discussed in chapter three the government of The Gambia and numerous organisations have attempted through a number of scholarship schemes and campaigns to encourage girls into school. This was evident from the number of posters and paintings on the side of schools. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show some of the posters that have been used to encourage girls into school by illustrating the advantages and opportunities available to those girls who are educated. From focus group discussions participants spoke how it was important for girls to be educated for the development of their country. However, participants announced boys wanted to be educated so they can go to 'Babylon' (Europe). Participants spoke about the advantages of girls being educated and the numerous opportunities available to those girls who have been to school. They spoke about the comparisons of their own lives to their female counterparts who have not been to school. This shows that the messages the government and NGOs are portraying about the importance of education are heard or seen by the targeted population.

**Figure 5.1: Part of the Teachers' Union Campaign to Encourage Girls into School**

Image has been removed for copyright reason.

(Source: Author's photograph, 2007)

**Figure 5.2: Poster Illustrating Young Women at School**

Image has been removed for copyright reason.

Image has been removed for copyright reasons.

(Source: Author's photograph, 2007)

These campaigns are targeted at parents as well as girls to show the advantages of education. Yet, interviews with teachers revealed how there are still some parents who have the view that “*school is not important as they end up in the kitchen*” (Teacher at upper basic school). These parents believed that education is not needed, as girls are to become wives and mothers. A few participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ and who had ‘never been to school’ also thought education was not important. They believed that early marriage was a good practice particularly for those who were not interested in their education. They said if a girl is not interested in education her parents may decide the best choice for her is to marry. This is because the family is using resources that could be used for other purposes if the girl is not serious about her education.

“Early marriage is a good practice because if a girl is not interested in education she will be taken to get married early because parents cannot pay her school fees while she is not interested” 17-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

There was the view that parents should not pay for girls’ education when they are not interested. The impression was given that this would not be the same for boys. Girls were not encouraged to improve their lives through education but that marriage would be the better option. Many participants ‘in school’ argued that education was

critical not only for employment but also for personal reasons. Participants in focus group discussions stated, “*without education you cannot do anything*” (16-year-old participant ‘in school’ during focus group discussion). There was a belief by the majority of participants ‘in school’ that an education could not only guarantee financial stability but also a better quality of life. This was an expectation not only by participants but also by their families. The quote below illustrates that the participant’s father expects her to ‘become somebody’. This involves having a job, being viewed in society as having a higher status and generally having a better standard of living. This shows that parents have high educational expectations particularly for girls attending senior secondary school.

“My father he expects me to become somebody important in future since he knows he is not wasting his money in paying my school fees so he expects no failure from me” narrative from 17-year-old participant ‘in school’

It is not only financial reasons as to why parents have high expectations. Mothers narrated how respectability and recognition by society are also perceived as an advantage of being educated. By ‘certain people’ the mother means that some people who are educated may ignore those people who have not been to school.

“If not educated you are not counted in certain places. You are ignored in some areas by certain people” Mother of participant ‘in school’

Participants ‘in school’ did not just want the benefits of being educated to be repaid in terms of their own success but also their families. Participants ‘in school’ discussed how girls want to be educated so they can help support their families. Participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ also discussed this. They were eager to show their appreciation to their families by providing them with financial assistance. Participants ‘in school’ and those who had ‘dropped out of school’ also considered the importance of an education or having a skill on their own future family life. They believed they would not have to rely on a husband and would become more independent.

“Education is very important because I want to be independent, do things for myself and not rely on my husband” narrative from 17-year-old participant ‘in school’

Participants who had ‘never been to school’ were envious of girls who could go to school. They understood that the differences in their lives would not only be during their school years but for their whole life. Although most participants narrated this better way of life through having an education would transfer to better work opportunities.

“If I was at school I wouldn’t have to be selling or have a difficult way of living” 19-year old participant ‘never been to school’

The above quote shows that the above participant is out of touch with girls who do go to school. The participant believes that she would not be involved in the informal sector, however, background literature in chapter three and evidence from this study shows that for many girls in school they are still involved within the informal sector during and after completing school. Figure 5.3 is taken from a focus group discussion. Participants wanted to illustrate how a girls life would be if she did not have the chance to attend school.

**Figure 5.3: Participants perception of a girl’s life without an education**

Image has been removed for copyright reason.

(Source: Author’s Photograph, 2007)

Participants commented on what they had drawn. The picture on the left hand side shows a girl of 15 years old at home, she is married and has one child. The

picture on the right shows how her life would be 10 years later. The picture shows that the woman has more children. The participants stated how the woman wants to send her children to school, to enable her children to have a better life.

There is the belief that education will provide all the answers to a better way of life by lifting young people out of poverty. Although education does play an important role in changing lives of young people, and inevitably the transitions they take to adulthood, for many who have been educated their perceived future as successful adults in both their public and private spheres of life still remains uncertain.

### *Domestic Roles and Responsibilities*

Traditional gender roles determine young women's domestic roles and responsibilities. Women in the extended family play an important role in the socialisation of girls. Participants discussed how grandmothers, aunts and mothers would train them in their domestic roles and responsibilities. Participants narrated how it was often their grandmothers who taught them so their mothers could take part in informal work. A part of this learning process for girls is learning how to manage a home for when they become a wife and mother, regardless of their education status.

In this research, participants stated their role in their family was to participate in domestic work, look after siblings and undertake some income generating activities. Timelines illustrated that participants start domestic work from five years old. Between the ages of five to ten years they contribute to domestic chores including washing bowls, sweeping the compound, fetching water and collecting firewood. From eleven years old these activities continue whilst also learning how to cook, wash clothes and iron clothes; by fifteen years old all participants were competent in all domestic roles. Domestic roles and responsibilities increase with the age of the participant due to the physical demand of some of the tasks. All participants were aware this training was to make them competent wives and mothers. Participants, regardless of their education level, were taught that as a girl, and for their expected future roles, they were expected to learn these gendered roles.

“At the age of 14 years I began to cook at home because it was time to know all the things before getting married. I start washing my clothes and ironing them, washing the dishes and also all the housework because I was training so that before I reach 18 years

and get married I can do all without no-ones help” narrative from 17-year-old participant ‘in school’

The quote above shows that this girl knows that by 18 years she has to be able to complete all domestic tasks, as this is the time when she is now expected to marry. This shows that there is a time or an age in life in which girls should know how to cook, wash clothes and look after the house. Narratives with mothers discussed that due to social and cultural reasons domestic roles had changed little over the generations. Mothers thought that girls nowadays do less domestic work and do not help the family as much as they used to do. However, part of the mothers’ day was not occupied by going to school, which could interfere with girls domestic responsibilities. Participants were eager to escape from their ‘traditional’ roles. This is partly because, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, participants wanted to become ‘somebody’.

“You face all the housework. You have to get up early in the morning, you cook breakfast, bath younger ones, sweep the compound and prepare and go to the market, by 11 in the morning. Go back to cook lunch, after cooking lunch wash the clothes and around 5pm go to the farm to weed and water the crops. After the farm go back and cook dinner” Mother of participant ‘never been to school’

As discussed by Mensch *et al* (1998) cited in chapter two, engaging young women in household activities restricts their movement in society, thereby controlling their sexuality. This was also reflected in this research. A number of participants stated they were not allowed out, as it is not safe outside the home. Parents want to protect the virginity of their daughters before marriage. Mothers stated that girls wanted to go out and socialise and this was very different from their generation. By participating in domestic work, parents could control their daughters time, who daughters see and where they go. Participants ‘in school’ wanted more freedom than other participants; this is partly due to their movements being less restricted as they attend school and mix with boys. Parents do not want their daughters to stay long outside because of potential unwanted attention from boys and men. The participant, quoted below, implies that her parents believe that boys and men want to have sex.

“As girls we are not allowed outside, especially at night, because they (parents) say it is not safe for us, as there are boys and men

that want things from you” 17-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Girls were given the impression from their parents that by going outside, they will be subjected to sexual advances and this would put them in danger. For parents protecting girls from sex is important and this would accelerate a girl’s transition to womanhood, as she would no longer be a virgin<sup>13</sup>.

## ***Multiple burdens***

Chapter two explored the impact of education on young women’s domestic responsibilities and how this affected their retention and performance in school. From interviews with NGOs, domestic roles were also recognised as a problem to performance at schools in The Gambia. Through narratives and 24-hour clocks it was identified that for the majority of participants ‘in school’ there are multiple burdens between domestic roles and school. However, these multiple burdens are extended to participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ and ‘never been to school’ between domestic roles and skills training centre or informal employment. An interview with the YMCA stated how girls would restructure their day so they could complete their domestic roles and still go to school. This shows how girls value the opportunity of going to school. The perceived social roles of girls are affected by the legal necessity to enrol girls in school.

“To ensure girls adjust to these domestic chores they are asked to wake up early at 5.00am so as to do some of these chores before going to school and to complete the rest when they return from school. This normally leaves them with little or no time to read their books which greatly affects their education and make them fail a lot of their examinations” interview with key informant at YMCA, 2007

The above quote also illustrates the length of a girl’s day. The consequence of a long day includes poor academic performance as they are unable to study at home and the failing of exams because they are tired at school. The double-shift system enables girls to help complete their tasks either in the morning or after school. As discussed in chapter three by Kea (2007) the double-shift system has an impact on

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<sup>13</sup> This point is discussed further in the following chapter which discusses sexual knowledge and behaviour, marriage and childbearing.



school attendance, school performance and domestic work. The introduction of the double-shift system has helped to facilitate access to schools for more girls; however, it has also affected the school experience. It was a universal statement by teachers at the participant schools that girls in the morning shift perform better than those attending the afternoon shift. This was because girls in the afternoon had a morning of completing domestic tasks and would therefore be tired and find it hard to concentrate. This means that they are at a disadvantage compared to the girls in the morning. This can have an impact later for their transition from school to work, as they may not have achieved the grades they need for further training or education. This will make it difficult for girls to gain formal employment.

“When I go home I don’t have chance to study so sometimes I wake early and study but that makes me more tired at school. I come to school after cooking and sometimes I have a headache. Walking to school I become tired and I can’t concentrate at school”  
narrative from 15-year-old participant ‘in school’

Participants attending the morning shift stated they prefer to stay at school after they have finished their lessons. Participants in the morning shift used school as a place of relaxation, leisure and study time. This shows how education creates additional time for young people to engage in activities that would be considered ‘normal’ in the West. Once they reach home they have to cook lunch and undertake other domestic work during the afternoon. The 24-hour clocks illustrated that because of social pressures participants had little or no time to study or complete homework. They informed the researcher that by the time they have finished their domestic work the light is poor and they are unable to do their homework. Some participants mentioned they would wake up early in the morning just to study as this was the only time of the day it was quiet. This lengthens their day making them tired while at school resulting in poor performance.

Evidence in chapter three by DOSBSE (2008) illustrated the high failure rate at schools; this can partly be attributed to the quality of education but also domestic responsibilities and the difficulty in studying outside school. Narratives from some participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ revealed how they were removed from school because it is seen to be their fault that they were failing and they were wasting family resources. This has consequences for their future employment. Without qualifications, young women are unlikely to enter the formal work sector.

Focus group discussions with participants in senior secondary school revealed how they were able to delegate some of their domestic work to younger siblings, allowing them to concentrate on their studies. They discussed that because their parents had paid a lot of money for them to attend senior secondary school, they were more willing to assign domestic work to younger members of the family. A large amount of pressure was placed on these participants to have good results; therefore, parents did not want them to be distracted. This shows there is a financial invested interest in senior secondary school and some parents are willing to alleviate some of the expected gender roles.

“I have less domestic work as I am in my secondary schooling and I have younger sisters who I can tell to do some domestic work”  
16-year-old participant ‘in school’ during focus group discussion

Narratives from participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ revealed that this change in assigning domestic work was only reserved for girls in senior secondary school. Some participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ told how, as the older female sibling, they were removed from upper basic school so they could carry out domestic roles in order for younger siblings to attend school. Participants who thought they were not intelligent enough for school and stated how they sacrificed their time to enable younger siblings to attend school. They further expressed how their parents had limited resources and believed it was important that all their children had at least some time at school.

Interviews with teachers and informants from Forum of African Women Educationalist The Gambia (FAWEGAM) informed the researcher how they had noticed that the expected roles of girls were gradually changing in the household, particularly where parents had been educated. Key informants told the researcher that educated parents are thought to understand the significance of sending girls to school, and will therefore be more likely to share domestic responsibilities between family members. Not only do these households understand the importance of girls being educated but they also understand the need for girls to be able to study at home. By sharing domestic roles young women will be less tired at school, be able to perform better, increase their time to study and graduate with better grades with an improved chance to access formal sector employment. Despite high unemployment rates, young women with high grades are better equipped to access this sector.

“These roles have changed in few homes. Like the homes of educated parents because these parents feel their girl children need to concentrate more on their books. But it is still the norm in the majority of families in The Gambia” interview with key informant at YMCA, 2007

Interviews with teachers and narratives with mothers revealed how they believed schooling enabled girls to manage their time more efficiently. This would greatly prepare them for the challenges and the multiple domestic roles, informal work and family life they face in womanhood. On reaching womanhood status, time at school is replaced by time dedicated to family responsibilities. Teaching young women how to manage their time prepares them for the notion of domestic responsibilities being ‘women’s work’, rather than the idea of sharing responsibilities.

“Because they are involved in housework, it helps them in school too; most of them can manage their time and take challenges”  
Teacher at senior secondary school

Girls take on many roles and challenges when they reach womanhood. The teacher implies that by juggling time from a young age helps girls to make the transition to these roles smoother.

## **Work**

It has been discussed in chapter two by Ansell (2005) and Abebe (2007) that many girls will work in the informal sector from an early age. Therefore work is not associated with adult status but as a continuation of childhood roles. Young people also have a legal requirement to work for the family. The Children’s Act 2005, states it is the duty of the child to work for the cohesion of his or her family. This can have an impact on education, particularly for girls. Some of the participants who had ‘never been to school’ stated they did not attend school because their families needed them to work.

## ***Multiple burdens***

A number of participants ‘in school’ and participants who ‘dropped out of school’ had multiple burdens of schooling, domestic work and informal work, with both types of work impacting on their education and training. Focus group discussions

and narratives from participants 'in school' revealed they were involved in selling vegetables and groundnuts in markets. This illustrates the continuation of work for some girls rather than a school-to-work transition.

“I sell groundnuts so I can pay my school fees and my sisters also, sometimes if I sell many my mum gives me D25” narrative from 14-year-old participant 'in school'

Some participants 'in school' believed that if a girl has to work to pay for her education she will study hard, but they stated because girls' education is free at primary level or subsidised at further levels some do not try at school. This shows that not all girls value the benefits of education. Whether this was due to parental attitudes affecting girls' impressions or girls believed that education would not benefit them as work is a man's responsibility is unclear.

Some of the participants helped their mothers working in a garden co-operative, before and after school. They would then sell some of the produce. The money was then used to help provide for the family and to pay for school.

“When I was old enough I was given my own garden beds. I had three to look after so when my aunt can sell some that will pay for my school fees” narrative from 15-year-old participant 'in school'

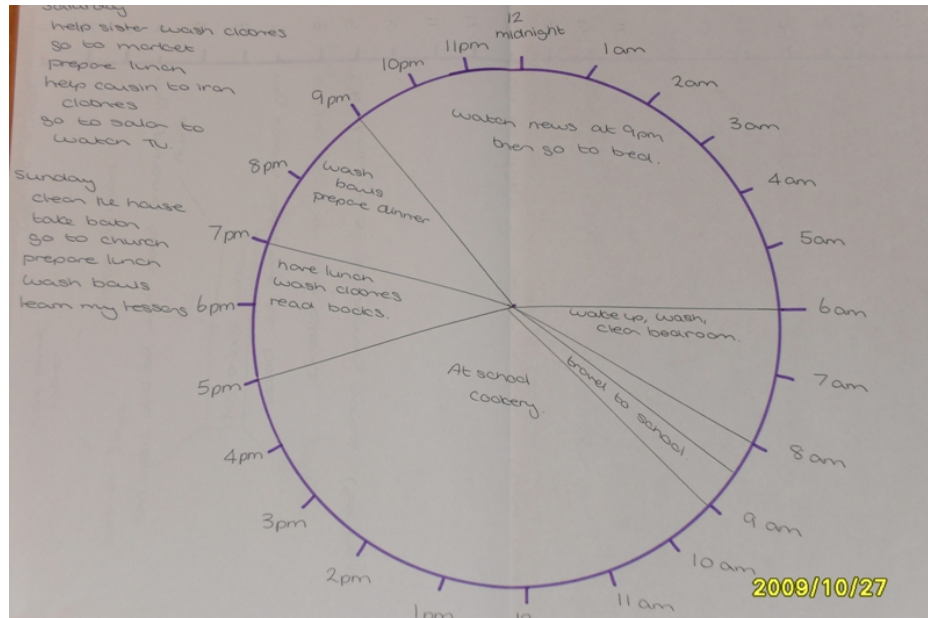
The majority of participants at the skills training centres also participated in some type of work to pay for their training. They mostly used the skills they were learning to earn some income. This shows the importance that the participants placed on learning a skill to improve their livelihood. Work is again seen as a continuation of experience to enables these girls to gain experience to be able to have a job after completion at the skills training centre. Participants at the skills training centres were older than the other cohorts, and their families, although willing to let them attend the centre, needed them to contribute to the household.

“I do some small work, braiding hair and also wash neighbours' clothes. The money I make will help me pay transport to get to school” 20-year-old participant 'dropped out of school'

During narratives 24-hour clocks were completed with all participants. This enabled the researcher to gather data on their typical day, illustrating the length of time participants spent on certain activities such as domestic roles and work. Figure

5.4 shows an example of a 24-hour clock produced by a participant who had ‘dropped out of school’.

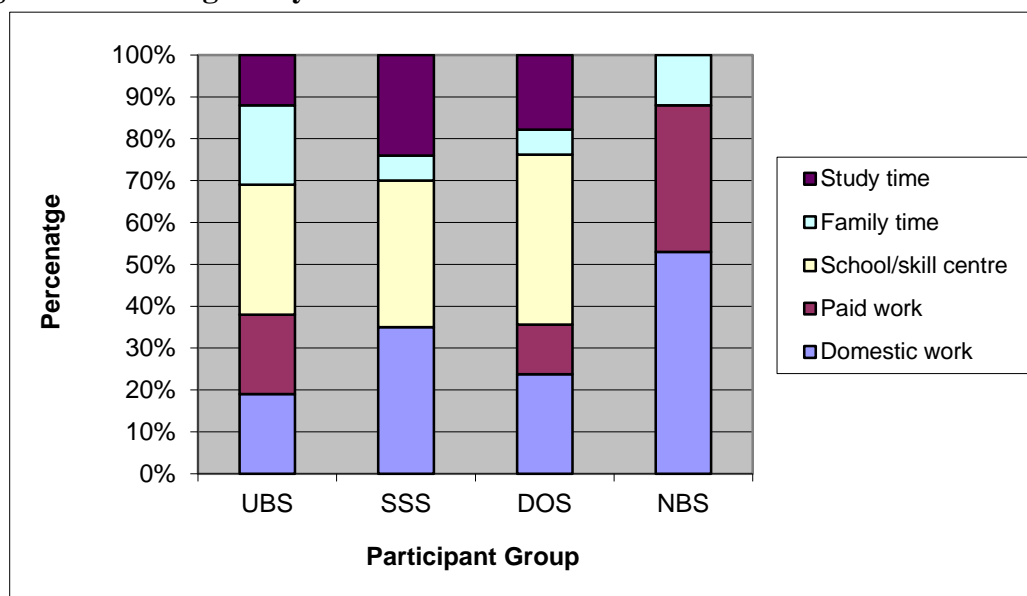
**Figure 5.4: Photograph of a participant’s 24-hour clock**



(Source: Author's Photograph, 2007)

The 24-hour clocks and individual timelines allowed the researcher to view what, if any, transitions had taken place among participants. This data was collected together and allowed the researcher to show the proportion of activities that participants are involved in on a daily basis. Figure 5.5 shows the daily activities of one participant from each group. The activities undertaken, although taken from one participant, are typical of all the respondents in the same group. The figure shows how participants' daily activities are segregated into different actions for certain times of the day.

**Figure 5.5: Average daily activities**



(Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2007)

Figure 5.5 shows how participants' days are proportioned and the amount of time they spend on each activity. Participants at the upper basic school (UBS) spent equal amounts of time participating in family time, domestic work and paid work. Participants at the senior secondary school (SSS) spent equal amounts of time in school and undertaking domestic work and because they were at senior secondary school they spent more time studying. The majority did not take part in any paid work. This illustrates the point made early concerning parents wanting their daughters to do well at senior secondary school. Participants who had 'dropped out of school' (DOS) spent most of their time involved at the skills training centre. Alongside participants at the senior secondary school they spent the least time with their family, but did spend more time studying than participants at upper basic school. Participants who had 'never been to school' (NBS) spent just over half their day participating in domestic work and over one third of their day undertaking paid work.

### ***Impact of education on work opportunities***

Participants 'in school' believed the qualifications they achieved from formal education would be enough to enter the formal work sector. Participants 'in school' and mothers of these respondents valued the importance of education for entry into formal work. Mothers stated how they were proud of their daughters' achievement in school and the possibility of them having a high status job: after all this is why they sent them to school. Mothers of participants 'in school' commented that women's roles have started to change because of education. Mothers narrated how employment was becoming important for girls and marriage was no longer their only option.

“[I was] not educated as it was a waste of time for girls and they don't have a job and have money that was man's business. Now you have to have a good job before you get married. It was just to get married before when it was my time” Mother of participant 'in school'

This shows that transitions have also changed. Whereas before, girls' lives would be controlled by pressures of marriage, education has extended the number of choices available to them. There is a high value placed on education and pressure was placed on participants to improve not only their lives but the lives of the family. There was a sense from some mothers and some participants who had 'never been to school' that they were envious of the future prospects for girls with an education. There is the belief that girls are able to compete in a male arena despite conflicting with social and cultural gendered divisions of labour.

"Because of girls' education, girls are working in offices and important places. If I was educated I will be able to do the same as the girls my age, I would be earning money like my friends but I have not been to school" 24-year-old participant 'never been to school'

Participants 'in school' spoke about their future employment aspirations: these included mostly working in a bank and becoming an accountant. This was because these jobs are associated with high status and good pay. Participants indicated they would "*want to dress in a suit*" (15-year-old participant 'in school'), believing they would be viewed by society as in a higher class. High grades and further education is needed to achieve these types of jobs. However, the ability to achieve these occupations is limited as there are high unemployment rates and competition for jobs with men. This affects their transition to formal sector work.

As discussed in chapter three, students at the end of upper basic school have to decide what stream they want to be in at senior secondary school, commerce, science or arts. However, participants revealed they were rarely guided to consider particular academic decisions and what they would mean for their future. Participants in senior secondary school revealed how commerce was the most popular stream; however, they discussed how there are limited places on each stream and it would often be girls that would be left disappointed. This would have an impact on their future employment aspirations.

Participants unaware of the difficulties of employment believed that after they had completed all necessary further training, they would find employment quickly and easily. Participants were under the impression that education would make sure they would be successful in work. With high unemployment levels for young people it is

increasingly difficult to find paid formal work after completing Grade 12. An interview with a key informant from the Gender Education Unit stated;

“Even with a Grade 12 certificate it is difficult to have a job. Employers want more than just a Grade 12 certificate” interview with key informant at Gender Education Unit, 2006

Interviews with the National Youth Council discussed the limited opportunities for young people even when they have completed their education. However, this knowledge was not passed on to young people. With the types of employment aspirations participants stated many would need to attend higher education. However, as discussed in chapter three, most girls are unable to attend higher education because of the financial and social cost. For the majority higher education is too expensive and the age at which they would attend is deemed by society the age at which they should marry.

“It is very difficult to have a job. There is no opportunity, you end up just sitting at home and you don’t have the money to look after your family after they have spent money on your education” interview with key informant at National Youth Council, 2007

In practice, some participants found that once they had completed their formal education there was nothing for them to do. One participant who had ‘recently left school’, and was unable to find employment, decided to attend a skill training centre, assuming she would have a better chance of earning some money after learning a skill. The participant narrated how she believed the education she had received at school did not supply her with relevant skills she could use to generate an income or find formal employment. She stated how many of her peers viewed her going to a skills centre as a sign of failure and she had wasted her parents’ money, as she had completed senior secondary school.

“I feel I see many graduates do these courses, AAT and other courses and they sit at home and have nothing to do. So I said let me try so I will find a skill and I enjoy cooking so I came to the centre. People think someone who doesn’t go to school should go to a skill centre, not someone who finish their education. People always laugh at me when I said I wanted to be a cook, they said why are you continuing with school and I was wasting my education” 20-year-old participant ‘recently left school’



Participants at the skills training centres had a better understanding of the limited opportunities in the formal sector. Although a large number of skills training centres teach subjects that girls learn at home through domestic work, the advantage of training at a skills training centre is a certificate that can be used in employment. Participants at the skills training centres believed the training they received was better than a school education. They believed that with a skill they would be able to participate in work that would provide them with a chance to earn a living. The skills they learnt could be used to generate an income, not only after they completed the centre but also during. The head-teacher at one of the skills training centres stated “*young women can use skills to be self-employed*”. Participants with a skill believed they would always be able to do some work and earn an income to support the family.

“Learning a skill is better than normal education. You get a certificate but this one is your life skill you can be self employed. To me here [skills training centre] is better you can’t always get a job when finished senior school. Those at skill centre will have money before those after finished grade 12” 26-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ and who had ‘never been to school’ were more aware of the difficulties of finding work opportunities. They believed a formal education for many is a waste because of the high unemployment rates. Participants who had ‘never been to school’ believed the informal education they received at home, through domestic roles and informal work, would more likely guarantee a more productive livelihood. This makes the notion of education as problematic. Although a formal education increases the knowledge of young people and this knowledge can be translated to the household, and in a few instances to work, learning a skill or an informal education at home often provides young women with the necessary skills for work opportunities and a better chance to provide for their family. This shows that work is not seen as a transition and that education does not necessarily have a positive impact on work transitions.

### ***Working for the needs of the family***

Families expect their daughters to find a job after they have completed their education in order to support them. Participants ‘in school’ stated it was important to have a job so they could support their family in terms of making a significant financial

contribution. One of the reasons stated by mothers for not letting girls attend school was the belief that benefits would be passed to the husbands' family after marriage. Mothers stated how they sent their daughters to school thinking of the future economic returns.

Participants who felt the greatest pressure were the eldest female child in a family with no brothers. These participants believed that they were their parents' only chance of a better livelihood. Education cannot only give participants a better way of life but also their parents. Participants at the skills training centre also had high expectations placed on them by family members. They stated how family members were eager for them to finish their training so they can start using the skill they had learnt in order to support the family.

“I have to help my mother. The rest of the family are boys. My mum only have one girl so I help my mother with all the work and I help her washing other people's clothes, and sometimes they pay me. They will like it if I finish here then I will have a job to help them” 19-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school

The above quote illustrated that there is an urgency to have a job to support the family. One participant who had ‘recently left school’ narrated how she sacrificed her education in order to go to work, not only to look after the family, but also to enable her younger sisters to attend primary school. She did not regard her self-sacrifice as unusual or problematic, simply stating it was needed for the family.

“For my mum the main problem is she get annoyed with me and says that I am not working hard. Especially when I don't give her money and she sees other families have money but I find myself a job and money but sometimes she thinks negative of me” 20-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

Even with a job and bringing money home to the family, the participant implies that her mother still wants her to contribute more to the family. This has implications for the daughter's transition to marriage, as the mother wants the daughter to stay at home because the other children are still at school and are not old enough to look after the family by themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Domestic roles and responsibilities prepare girls for their future roles as wives and mothers; this is the case in many societies. Education has a relatively small

impact on domestic roles; because educated girls are also expected to marry, they also need to know how to look after a household. In The Gambia most girls, regardless of their education, will be competent and have considerable experience in taking care of children, cooking and general care of the home. This prepares them from a young age for their gendered roles. Without an education participants who had 'never been to school' reflected they have limited opportunities but to be involved in domestic duties and working for the needs of the family in the informal sector through petty trading. They recognised they would not have much of a different way of life to their own mothers. As expected participants, who had 'never been to school' participate in more domestic duties than their educated peers.

The literature and findings from the research indicate that domestic roles impact upon education. Domestic duties lengthen the average day of a girl in school as she navigates the use of her time between the household and school. In The Gambia a double-shift system has enabled girls to do both. Some participants enjoyed the school experience because it allowed them to socialise; this loosens the control that parents have over their daughters. This also allows them to navigate the boundaries of their sexuality as they socialise with more members of the opposite sex. As parents are aware of these socialisations, they may remove girls from school to marry, thereby accelerating the transition to marriage and womanhood.

In The Gambia as in many sub-Saharan African countries work is not seen as a transition but as a continuation of experience (Ansell, 2005). Young women with a higher education may find this continuation leads them to formal employment, while young women who have 'never been to school' are aware their work opportunities are limited to the informal sector. Many work from a young age in the informal sector to meet the basic needs of the family and to provide school fees. Families who educate their daughters demand high expectations through successful achievement in order to secure employment. The expected returns to schooling include a high status job, access to resources and the ability to compete in a traditional male dominated society (Madhavan & Thomas, 2005). Although the ability for women to compete in formal employment is in opposition to gendered norms, parents 'look the other way' because of the future economic benefits for the family.

Skills training centres not only has the capacity to meet the learning needs of those who are unable to attend formal education but has the ability to increase employment opportunities. Skills training centres seem to facilitate the transition to

employment better than their counterparts with a formal education. In this sense those participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ may be more likely to find satisfactory employment than those with a formal education. They would also be likely to have the same opportunities as those who complete upper basic school. Through knowledge gained at school or through skills training centre participants’ capabilities and opportunities are greater than those who have ‘never been to school’.

Participants ‘in school’ and those ‘dropped out of school’ were more aware of women’s dependency on others. With an education or a skill participants believed they would not become dependent on others for their economic survival. Many participants mentioned the importance of having a job before marriage so as not to rely on a husband. If they had a job before they married, participants believed they would not have to resign, as their husband would also see the benefit of them working. This is despite the expected gender roles reinforcing the notion of the male breadwinner.

## Chapter Six

# Sexual Knowledge, Initiation, Marriage and Childbearing: Attitudes and Practices

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### Introduction

This chapter will explore and analyse the fieldwork results with regard to sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour, initiation, marriage and childbearing. These transitions have been grouped together as they focus upon the reproductive sphere of young people's lives. Firstly, sexual and reproductive knowledge and behaviour will be examined. Initiation ceremonies involving female 'circumcision' will then be explored including how this practice has changed and the reasons for the continuation of the practice. Finally, marriage and childbearing will be examined including early and forced marriage, early pregnancy and the reasons behind these practices. All of the transitions will be examined within the context of education and how it affects them.

### Sexual and Reproductive Knowledge & Behaviour

Focus group discussions with participants at the upper basic school revealed early sex, early pregnancy, early marriage, boys 'following'<sup>14</sup> girls, girls 'following' boys and falling in love with teachers were some of the main challenges facing young women in The Gambia. These discussions illustrated how sexual and reproductive challenges were thought to be the primary difficulties girls face in society. These concerns were also raised through narratives with all participants. These challenges focus on the importance of girls maintaining their virginity until they are married. Culturally the importance of protecting virginity is to help to control a girl's sexuality. Participants narrated how they are taught through social and cultural values, that as a

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<sup>14</sup> Participants implied that both sexes would pursue or chase on another.

girl you are a virgin and should not have sex until you are married. However, in this research two participants 'in school', three participants 'dropped out of school' and six participants 'never been to school' reported that they had sex before they were married. This had resulted in pregnancy for one participant who had 'dropped out of school' and for two participants who had 'never been to school'. Although not conclusive, the data from this research shows participants 'in school' were less likely to engage in premarital sex<sup>15</sup>. All participants stated the importance of protecting their virginity prior to marriage. Some indicated that for girls to protect their virginity they have to stay away from boys. The quote below illustrates that the participant implies that losing virginity is a transition to womanhood. She also states how it is girls that initiate sex by following boys, and how it is sometimes girls' responsibility to stop following them.

“You have to protect yourself and stop following those boys. If they destroy your virginity you are no longer a girl” 17-year-old participant 'dropped out of school'

Mothers were worried that their daughters would engage in premarital sex and become pregnant. As discussed in chapter three in relation to The Gambia, this concern stems from the need of parents to find a suitable husband for their daughter. Mothers discussed that if a girl has engaged in premarital relationships and is pregnant it is difficult to find a husband. One participant 'in school' narrated an example of the importance associated with virginity.

“One of my friends her dad thinks she was sleeping with a guy in the house. Her dad took her to the hospital to see if she was a virgin. After, her dad realised it was not true” narrative from 16-year-old participant 'in school'

The value placed on virginity was expressed through focus group discussions at both schools. Participants 'in school' discussed how they are made to believe certain activities could 'dis-virgin' them. They stated how they were advised by elders and their mothers not to ride bicycles or to take part in sporting activities, as they would be 'dis-virgined'. It could be that mothers narrate this misconceptions to girls

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<sup>15</sup> However, it is worth stating because the interviews were conducted face-to-face underreporting of premarital sex is a strong possibility.

in school because they are more likely to mix with the opposite sex while at school. Girls were misguided, to protect their virginity so as not to bring shame on the family.

“Girls are not allowed to ride bicycles. People believe girls could be dis-virgined from riding bikes” 17-year-old participant ‘in school’ from focus group discussion

The quote below shows how the following participant discussed how she liked to keep active but her mother told her it would not only ‘dis-virgin’ her but that it would also be difficult during childbearing. The participant did not believe this to be true. This shows there is a significant differentiation between educated girls and their uneducated mothers.

“I like running and I am good at athletics but my mum asked me to stop because she said it will dis-virgin me and it will be hard to have a baby if I carry on” 21-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

Through individual timelines, participants narrated the physical changes they saw in themselves as they reached puberty. They discussed how when other female relatives viewed these changes they were simply instructed to stay away from boys and men. The importance of having a husband before sex is the important message female relatives try to instil in young women. Some participants stated how they were frightened into believing how they could get pregnant so they would not have sex.

“I was ashamed and afraid to tell my mum at 13/14 years about my period so I told my auntie who said that I have to be careful now. Because if a man touches me I will be pregnant so I was very afraid” 20-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

Participants discussed how cultural values informed them of having to abstain from sex until marriage. They also agreed that social and cultural values play a major role and affects the lives of girls and women’s sexuality.

“You have to wait until you are married because in our culture when you see your menstruation they advise you not to lie with any man or any boy. You should not do sexual intercourse with anybody but your husband” 20-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Mothers narrated how sexual ignorance was the best way for girls to abstain from sex before marriage, believing if girls are taught about sex they are more likely

to engage in the practice. Some parents believe sex education should not be taught in schools but they should be the ones to inform their children. Mothers were concerned that girls in school would be taught areas of sexual health they do not need to know about. Formal education challenges many social and cultural traditions, and girls in school are adopting values and practices that conflict with elders and also uneducated girls and women.

“Elders believe the teacher will teach everything about reproductive health and parents think that girls should not know. Girls should sit at home and just have a husband, they think that education spoils virginity. They say boys will follow you putting on skirt they just prefer girls to stay at home” 21-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

This participant implies that some mothers believe that an education will spoil a girl’s virginity as they become more aware of sexual behaviours and knowledge through the curriculum at school. Mothers believe that education makes them more sexually advanced. There is also an understanding from this participant that the skirts girls wear as a uniform arouses the interests of boys; while girls are not able to stand up against these advances.

Some mothers felt girls were becoming more sexually aware at earlier ages than their generation. They partly attributed this to schools teaching sexual health in the school curriculum. While education provides a detailed account, for example reproduction and STIs, it is culture that determines what they should really know, for example, abstinence.

“Girls grow up very quickly and are more sexually aware than at my age” Mother of participant ‘never been to school’

However, the teachings at school are not the only conflicting notion. A parent’s fear of pregnancy is heightened when a girl has a boyfriend. With social mixing in schools girls are more likely to have boyfriends. Many participants narrated they would not always tell their parents if they had a boyfriend as they would not be allowed to see them.

“Things are very hard for me at home. I have a boyfriend but my mum and dad tell me I can’t see him. I have to hide when I go and see him, when I come back there is some problem though,



sometimes they lock me in” 21-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

This participant was placed under control by her parents, much to her frustration. The majority of participants reported they were not allowed out during the evening because of concerns for their safety. This stems back to the value of virginity. Participants ‘in school’, in particular, wanted more freedom from their parents and to become more independent. This was because their movements were less restricted and they could socialise with more young people their own age and members of the opposite sex while in school. A concern of pregnancy heightens the fear that the girl becomes less marriageable.

“My mum thinks I go with boys if I go out at night. She beats me when I come home if she sees me with them. I would like to go out at night but my mum says it is not safe because of boys and becoming pregnant” 23-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

Although fears of pregnancy were largely reported by participants, during the research STIs were rarely discussed. Discussions on HIV/AIDS were centred around the consequences of sex at an early age. Knowledge of prevention and transmission was very limited in all participant groups, although more participants ‘in school’ knew more about the disease. Most participants narrated sex as a mode of transmission and condom use as a method of prevention. The research did reveal that participants mainly cited condom use as a method for preventing STIs but not as a preventative method for pregnancy. However, participants discussed that condoms should be used when having sex outside of marriage.

“When making love you don’t want sickness like AIDS. You tell a boy to put on a condom. If you don’t put it on you can get pregnant or AIDS” 25-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Participants ‘in school’ stated how some girls are asking boys to use condoms. However, this creates problems with parents due to cultural ideals. Parents encourage their daughters to abstain from sex and rarely discuss condoms as this is believed to encourage premarital sex. Parents believe sex is an act purely for marriage and should only be discussed between husband and wife.

“Now girls are asking boys to use condoms and some parents don’t accept this” 21-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

By adopting different ideals about sexuality, girls with an education are creating boundaries between themselves and uneducated girls and women. As girls in school are more aware of sexual knowledge, this has created boundaries in knowledge and attitudes towards sexuality which are different from those who are not educated. This also challenges traditional gender roles, as women are often not included in decisions regarding their own sexuality.

### ***Sexual Exploitation***

During focus group discussions and narratives participants raised concerns about sexual exploitation. The majority of participants mentioned receiving unwanted attention from boys at school, male teachers, men in the community and sugar daddies. Some participants ‘in school’ discussed how if a boy wants sex and the girl does not, the boy will give the girl a drink with some ‘medicine’ in it, which makes the girl feel drowsy and he then forces the girl to have sex with him.

“When you have a boyfriend and you visit the boy one day he make a juice for you and put there a medicine and then he lay down with you” 15-year-old participant ‘in school’ from focus group discussion

Many participants reported the difficulties in trying to say ‘no’ to sexual advances from boys. They discussed how they often felt pressured to have sex, particularly when a boyfriend says ‘*I love you*’. This has implications for a more traditional route of transition to womanhood through marriage. Regardless of their educational level, the majority of participants felt they would be unable to say no to sex.

“It is difficult to say no. When I had a boyfriend he say that it is ok to have sex because he love me” 20-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

‘Sugar daddy’ relationships were treated as a light-hearted notion, with much laughter when discussing the topic. This contrasted with the topics of discussion surrounding girl-boy relationships and student-teacher relationships. Participants ‘in school’ reported sugar daddies were common and it was familiar to see some men

waiting outside the school grounds. Participants freely discussed stories of girls they knew who have or have had a sugar daddy.

“I know of someone who have a sugar daddy. The sugar daddy is taking care of her, buying her clothes, television, paying the house rent, do everything for her. Her parents know. For me it is not fair because that sugar daddy has a wife. You come and spend money on her and not spend money on your family and at the end she may become pregnant and then you throw her away” 14-year-old participant ‘in school’ from focus group discussion

Participants reported the main reason behind these relationships was money and gifts, not only due to poverty but because some girls were materialistic and wanted ‘nice things’. With the concern of sugar daddies there have been poster campaigns to address the issue. Figure 6.1 shows an example of a poster used in one of the campaigns. The poster is part of The Gambia’s Family Planning campaign. The poster is aimed at schoolgirls as the poster states that education will improve their lives and not money from rich men. It also explains the value of virginity citing how *all* men want to marry someone who is a virgin. The second picture depicts a school girl being approached by a man waving some money. The caption explains that although this opportunity has short term benefits it has long term problems. These problems could reiterate the first point: if a girl has premarital sex she will not find a future husband.

**Figure 6.1: Campaigning against Sugar Daddies**

Image has been removed for copyright reason.

(Source: Author’s Photograph, 2007)

Outside the school setting is not only a potential source of sugar daddies but it is claimed that school is a source of sexual exploitation by male teachers. As illustrated in chapter five numerous education campaigns have been successful by increasing girls’ enrolment, but girls may be unaware of the challenges they may face by attending school. Sexual advances of teachers, male students and sugar daddies have created a new challenge to the development of young women in school. These situations create a challenge to girls as these relationships will enable a girl to

continue her education but may cause her social and health problems<sup>16</sup>. Participants ‘in school’ reported frequent incidences of teacher advances. This was not just at their school but regarded as a widespread problem. Focus group discussions with participants at upper basic school revealed how some male teachers were ‘too young’ and this caused some to become attracted to female students.

“A teacher catches a girl’s eye and they ask you to come over and see them later at their house telling you they have books for you. But the girl get there and he want to have sex with you” narrative from 14-year-old participant ‘in school’

Participants were unaware of the channels available to them to report cases. Very few teachers and even fewer numbers of participants knew about the sexual harassment policy in place to protect students in schools. In many instances, participants narrated how they would be afraid to inform the school in case they were not believed and were threatened by the teacher.

“Male teachers chasing girls, they disturb us a lot. When chasing girls if they don’t do what they want they say I will fail you in my subject. They should be advised and reported to the head of school departments” narrative from 18-year-old participant ‘in school’

Participants reported if girls tried to refuse sexual advances, the teacher would reduce their marks and exam grades, while girls who agreed to these relationships would have their marks increased. The implication of reducing marks threatens girls’ future choices about further education and ultimately their employment prospects.

“We get abuse by teachers if a teacher advance on a girl and threaten that student that they will fail them if they don’t do what they want. They disturb girl students a lot by chasing them around school, sexual abuses and they create problems for the girl. If a girl says she will report him the teacher will threaten them” narrative from 17-year-old participant ‘in school’

### **Initiation Ceremonies: Female ‘Circumcision’**

Through narratives with mothers, they discussed their experiences of female ‘circumcision’ and the ceremony that accompanies the practice. They divulged that they had been circumcised between the ages of 12-15 years old. Mothers narrated how

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<sup>16</sup> A paper by Biddlecom et al, 2008 points out that in exchange for sex, students may receive assistance with school related expenses, which could increase the likelihood that the student will remain in school.

they were taught that they would be able to marry and what was expected from them. The ceremony was to inform society that they were now acceptable for marriage.

“[I was] taken to circumcision at 13 years old. We learn about what is expected and prepare you for your husband, what you can do and what you cannot do” Mother of participant ‘never been to school’

Within just one generation the structure of ‘circumcision’ has changed. Many participants did not know the age they were circumcised because they were so young. Those who did remember were aged between three months and nine years. This shows there has been a reduction in age at which young women are now circumcised; this is supported by Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007). A few participants could remember some of the details. They remembered travelling to villages and the festivities afterwards. Depending on their age most participants were just cut, while a few were taught about the expectations and roles and responsibilities of women.

“When they circumcise me they give me a robe and a drink and tie some things on my body to scare away the witches and devils. They will wash me with traditional medicine. The scent was horrible but they force you to wash in it” 25-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Many participants explained they were not told they were going to be circumcised. They explained how their mothers told them they were visiting family or simply going to the market. A few participants ‘in school’ narrated they were blindfold and then taken to be circumcised. There were only a few participants who thought it was unfair they did not know about being circumcised; believing they should make the choice. Participants discussed how they were not told where they were going so they could not refuse. The quote below illustrates how the participant was unaware and powerless to make a choice. This could, in part, help explain the lowering of the age of ‘circumcision’.

“They didn’t tell me when I was going to be circumcised they said we were going to my uncles. They put this white cloth around my eyes and crack me open and circumcise me. I was just a child, girls should be given the option it is not fair” 23-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Young women's educational level did have an effect on the age of the practice. Those participants who were circumcised at the older age range were more likely to be participants who had 'never been to school'. This is because parents fear with an education daughters would view the practice as harmful and would resist the procedure. Eight participants 'in school', two 'dropped out of school' and two 'never been to school' had not been circumcised this was because of their ethnicity. This shows that ethnicity is more important than education in determining whether they are circumcised or not. There were more young women 'in school' who had not been circumcised. This was not because of their education but it was not a part of the culture as the following quote explains.

"I have not been circumcised, it is not part of my culture, I am a Wolof" 18-year-old participant 'in school'

For one participant 'in school' 'circumcision' was still regarded as a preparation for marriage. She stated she had not been circumcised yet, as she would be circumcised just before she married. This is because she said, as a Fula, it was her tradition. For this participant circumcision was how she would achieve 'womanly' status. However, other participants who were also Fula did not recognise the practice in the same way.

### ***The reasons behind the practice***

As chapter two illustrated through data from the Population Reference Bureau (2001), the level of education of the mother had an effect on whether they would circumcise their daughter. This is not the case in The Gambia. The level of education of the participants does not affect their future choice of circumcising their own daughters. In this research all participants who had been circumcised did not view the practice as negative. Many cited the main reason to be circumcised was that they were told by their mothers and other female relatives that being circumcised helped during pregnancy and childbirth. By believing this girls are unlikely to abandon the practice. This shows mothers conflict with NGO programmes who are trying to eradicate the practice.

"It is good if circumcised when you are pregnant and deliver, it will not disturb you, when you are not circumcised some people

say you that you will have a problem” 19-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Most participants ‘dropped out of school’ and ‘never been to school’ cited the main reason for the practice was religion; for many, they cited circumcision was in the Koran. However, these participants have been misguided to believe that the Koran mentions female circumcision. Other reasons included it was a part of their culture, it is expected of young women and it helps to reduce a woman’s sexual desire.

“My view on female circumcision is making females to practice controlling themselves over too much sex. For example an uncircumcised woman will feel instantly honey at the touch of a man which will not be the same for a circumcised woman” 18-year-old participant ‘in school’

As discussed in chapter two by Althaus (1997), there is sometimes a girls’ desire to conform to peer pressure. One mother discussed how one of her younger daughters is teased by her friends. They say because she has not been circumcised she is not the same ‘class’ as them. Her daughter had brought a razor blade and given it to her aunt so she would circumcise her. The aunt refused but still the daughter asks when is it her turn to be circumcised.

“My daughter is made fun off by other girls as she has not been circumcised. The girls tease her and say she can not play with them as she is not the same as them. She has even brought a razor blade and asked her auntie to circumcise her” Mother of participant ‘never been to school’

### ***Campaigning against the practice***

Interviews with two NGOs discussed their efforts to eradicate female circumcision. One of the organisations GAMCOTRAP who has claimed to have had some success in getting some circumcisers to stop the practice. This has been called ‘dropping the knife’. The researcher was privileged to be invited to one of the ceremonies in which circumcisers declared they would no longer take part in the practice. Twelve circumcisers openly declared they would no longer take part in the practice at a ceremony in Bakau in May 2007.

Interviewees had noticed the changing notion of the practice during the last 10 years. They explained how a shift in a girl’s age has changed the underlying reason for the practice. Rather than an initiation to womanhood, girls are taken during

infancy. NGOs claimed the reason for a lowering in age was the eradication campaigns. They have attempted to create awareness of the negative health outcomes; however, as shown by the researcher's results, the participants in this research viewed circumcision as being positive.

“Before, some ten years back, girls were circumcised at the ages of 10-13 years up to 16 years to teach them about social values and norms and to understand the social dimensions of life. Now this phenomenon does not hold since the trend has changed as girls are taken during childhood below five years. This paradigm shift is as a result of a series of awareness raising, the people fear that when the girl realises the associated problems they will resist” interview with GAMCOTRAP, 2007

Hernlund (2000) and Skramstrad (2008) have both explored the restructuring of the practice, as shown in chapter three. This restructuring involved removing the physical procedure and concentrated on the teaching aspect. This was also the case in The Gambia. Through interviews with BAFROW and GAMCOTRAP, as the quote below illustrates, this research discovered the two parts of this practice were split into two, with often years separating them: the physical act during infancy and then the ritual of being taught socially defined roles. The significance of this is that girls are unable to refuse the physical procedure but it is still socially necessary to teach morality.

“Some girls who are circumcised during childhood and are taken later through a ritual festivity ceremony to be taught about socially defined moralities. This secondary form of initiation could be organised some five to ten years after they have been cut” interview with GAMCOTRAP, 2007

Figure 6.2 shows a poster advertising an alternative rite of passage. The poster was created by BAFROW who have played a major role in the restructuring of an alternative form of initiation.

**Figure 6.2: Restructuring Female Circumcision**

Image has been removed for copyright reason.



(Source: Author's Photograph, 2007)

As figure 6.2 suggests, although there are negative aspects to the tradition such as the physical cutting, the tradition is worth preserving. This is because the morals taught associated with the tradition are recognised as teaching girls their social and cultural gender roles. Despite the change in focus, the tradition of initiation is still seen as an important marker in the transitions to womanhood.

### **Marriage**

All participants stated the transition to womanhood would be completed when they married. Socially and culturally girls are defined as a woman when they marry. Five of the participants were viewed in society as women, as they were married. Three women 'dropped out of school' were married at 19 years, another at 23 years and one at 17 then again at 22 years and two participants who had 'never been to school' were married at 17 years and 21 years. These participants also regarded themselves as having entered womanhood because of their marriage status. As explored, the notion of losing virginity is also associated with 'woman' status and this is only socially acceptable during marriage. Therefore, the notion of marriage and virginity become bound together.

Participants, in relation to marriage, discussed the importance of virginity further. They stated how husbands want to marry a girl who is sexually inexperienced. If girls are virgins, they will gain respect not only from their husband but also from their in-laws. If there is proof that the girl has had sexual relations with somebody else this would mean they are a 'woman outside of marriage', but this is socially and culturally unacceptable.

"As a girl you wait for sex until you are married. It is encouraged by parents because everyone wants to marry to a fresh flower. Men don't want to marry someone who have been touched. If you are a virgin you gain respect from parents and in laws. If not they call you names like prostitute" narrative from 17-year-old participant 'in school'

The virginity of a girl has to be proven on the wedding night. To prove her sexual inexperience the husband and wife consummate the marriage on a white sheet. If there is blood on the sheet the girl has therefore proved she was a virgin. However, if there is no blood she will have problems from her husband and her in-laws. Although she is a woman because she is no longer a virgin, she is not viewed by society as a 'real' woman.

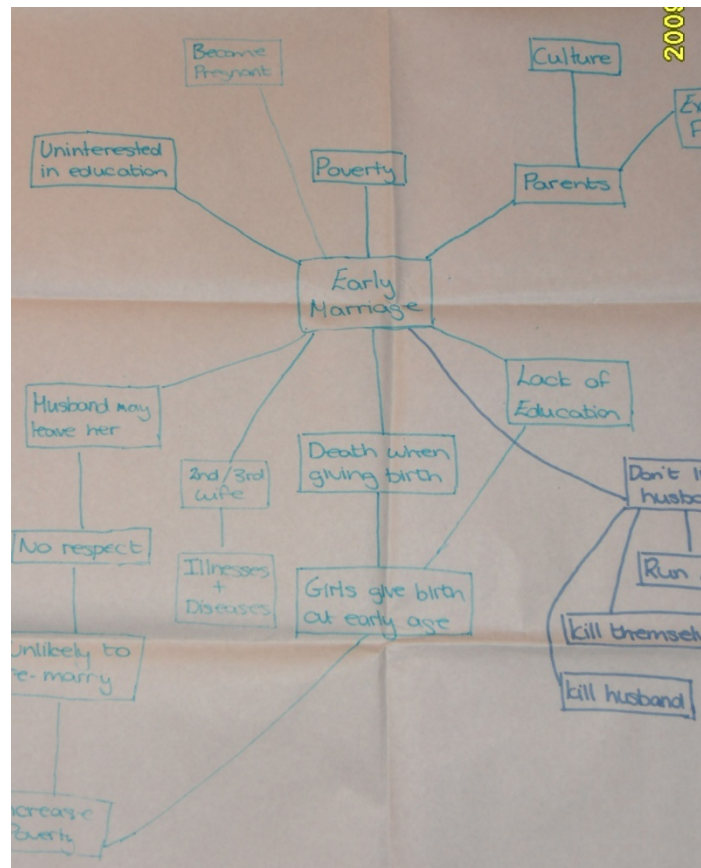
"After you marry you have sex with your husband. If you go for circumcision it will be easy. You will not feel pain but if you are not circumcised it will be difficult to please your husband. If they see blood on the white wrapper that is fine then you are a woman but if they do not see blood they will say that you are not a real woman" 24-year-old participant 'dropped out of school'

The beginning of the above quote is not surrounded by supported evidence. It shows that girls are misguided to so called 'positive' affects of circumcision. Girls are informed that circumcision is 'good' to help them when they are women and having sexual relations with their husbands.

### ***Early and forced marriage***

Supported by evidence in chapter two by Mensch (2005), culturally girls are thought to be old enough to marry at the start of menarche, as this signifies they are able to reproduce. Through cause and effect diagrams participants 'in school' and those 'dropped out of school' cited numerous reasons why girls are encouraged to marry early. Figure 6.3 shows an example of a cause and effect diagram made by participants in school during a focus group discussion. Participants who had 'never been to school' knew of only a few causes of early marriage. Reasons common to all participants included poverty, being forced into marriage and to stop girls from following boys. Other reasons cited by participants 'in school' and 'dropped out of school' included pregnancy, tradition, a lack of education and to control girls.

**Figure 6.3: Participants 'in school' cause and effect diagram on early marriage**



(Source: Author's Photograph, 2007)

The practice of early marriage was particularly associated with two ethnic groups, the Fulas and the Serahulis. Some young women knew of friends who had been married at an early age. The example below tells how a girl was removed from school to marry. Although reported incidences are rare it was common for participants 'in school' to narrate how they knew of a girl who was taken out of school to marry.

"Fulas usually practice early marriage. There was one of our classmates who get married at the age of fourteen years old. She stop her education at Grade 7. When she got married at such an early age she was taken to Guinea Bissau. Three months later she come back to her fathers house with pregnancy. Her father told her to go back to the husband and she refused to go back and the husband divorce her. Now the husband is married to another girl" 15-year-old participant 'in school' from focus group discussion

One participant who had 'never been to school' narrated how her brother and his wife forced her into marriage. The participant narrated how she became pregnant and her sister-in-law decided it would be better if the participant had a husband. The participant discussed that she felt she was being forced to marry so she was no longer

a burden to the family. The sister-in-law wanted her to marry so she would no longer be responsible for the participant and her daughter. The quote below also illustrates that the participant partly blames not having an education as a reason for her forced marriage and how she wants to change that for her daughter.

“My main problem was I have a child I was forced to get married by my brothers wife but I did not want to. My husband ill treated me and brought girlfriends to the house and I can’t say anything. My husband married another woman and I found I was pregnant and when I told him he told me to abort the pregnancy so I ran away. When my child was born he wanted to take her away and live with him so I sent my daughter to Freetown to live with my sister. I was not independent and not working so I can’t take care of my child and I want her to be educated” 27-year-old participant ‘never been to school’, forced to marry at 22

Although these examples are not uncommon, participants discussed how attitudes towards forcing girls to marry were starting to change. They discussed how some girls are able to negotiate delaying marriage. Some participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ and ‘never been to school’ narrated how they would persuade their parents to wait for a few more years until they could find someone they loved and wanted to marry. This shows some girls are able to discuss and make some decisions regarding marriage. However, participants stated they are only given a certain amount of freedom to find a husband before their parents will decide on one for them.

“My parents want me to marry a man but I told them I don’t want to marry someone I don’t love. I don’t want to be forced into marriage. My dad has brought someone to the house so I will marry him but I refuse because I don’t love him” 21-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

Through cause and effect diagrams, as shown in figure 6.3, participants ‘in school’ discussed the consequences of early marriage and cited a number of negative effects. These consequences included maltreatment by husband and in-laws; often the husband will take a second or third wife and early marriage leads to the young woman having many children. Participants also discussed consequences including suicide, running away from the husband and not being able to have a future. Participants also reflected upon how it would affect education. This is because some of them know of

cases where girls had been taken out of school for marriage. All participants viewed the practice of early marriage as negative. They wanted to believe in the notion of finding a husband themselves. They did not want to be influenced to a 'traditional' form of marriage.

“For girls in big families this may lead to early marriage because when the parents are poor they may decide to send the girl to get married. This also may lead to suicide or running away. And for example if the girl does not love the husband she may kill the husband or kill herself but if the girl love the husband she will live a better life” narrative from 17-year-old participant 'in school'

The effects of early marriage have become more prominent from newspaper stories and NGO programmes. In the local newspapers the researcher often read stories of the consequences of early marriage. For example, the Foroyaa newspaper on 3rd April 2007 reported how a 16-year-old girl in Basse tried to commit suicide by drinking battery acid after her parents tried to arrange a marriage for her. Although this and other acts of suicide are extreme cases, participants discussed how some girls would go to great lengths to avoid being forced into marriage, including early pregnancy. This would prove that they are no longer virgins. In particular, participants 'in school' reported how some girls would ask their boyfriends to make them pregnant so that they would not have to marry someone older whom they do not know or do not love. Other girls would ask their boyfriends to make them pregnant believing they would be able to marry them. This is particularly the case when parents disapprove of the boyfriend.

“Some girls get pregnant by another boyfriend just so they [do not] have to marry that man” 13-year-old participant 'in school' from focus group discussion

### ***Marriage and education***

It has been discussed in chapter two by Mensch (2005), that education can have an impact upon the timing of marriage. Many participants 'in school' understood culturally there is a sequencing to life which includes marriage. They were also aware that this timing for marriage was interrupted by education. Mothers also discussed how they were aware of the positive effect of education on their daughters. The mothers therefore hesitated between what is deemed culturally appropriate for girls, for example, time of life for marriage, and the necessity of education for a better future. An interview with FAWEGAM revealed, despite the Children's Act 2005,

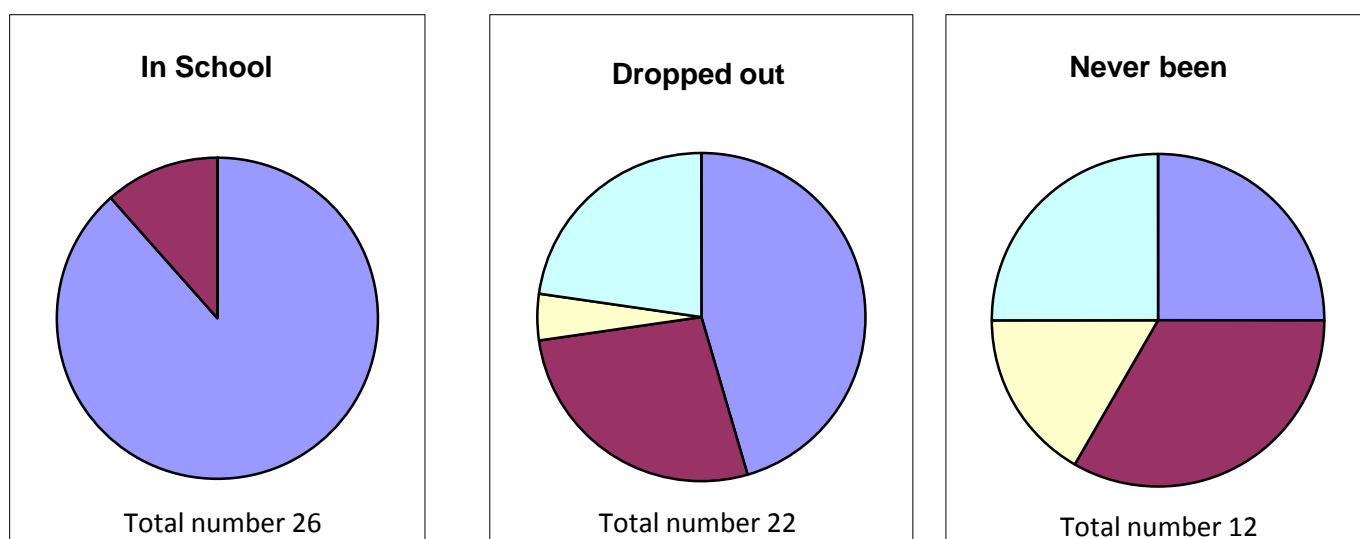
stating girls cannot be taken out of school for marriage, this Act has had little effect as awareness is low. The interviewee further stated that while education delayed marriage it was only successful until upper basic level.

“The only tool that successfully helps to delay early marriage is education. The trend is changing for girls who are going to school at least most of them are allowed to complete their upper basic schooling” interview with FAWEGAM, 2007

Culturally young women are ready for marriage from the onset on menarche, however, due to their biological age they are considered too immature to find a husband. Tradition defines that parents should decide their daughters’ husband and the timing of the marriage. This is because they believe they can choose a suitable husband. Rather than being emotionally involved, parents view the practicalities for their daughters’ needs in marriage. Participants discussed how they want to marry someone they love whereas parents want to find a husband who will support them. An interview with APGWA, an NGO concerned with female issues, discussed reasons why parents want to be included in the choice of husband.

“As such there is a cultural belief that the young are not too mature to think and decide on their own to get married. That marriage is not about getting any man. Therefore they as parents believe their choice for a husband for the girl is the best as they look at the family background of the man, his reputation and attitude which they believe a girl in love will not be able to figure” interview with APGWA, 2007

This research has shown education has started to change this conception. There was a strong belief by participants ‘in school’ that they should be able to choose whom to marry because they are educated. Figure 6.4 shows the results from participants when asked about who will decide who they marry. The majority of participants ‘in school’ thought they would be able to choose a husband suitable for themselves. By being educated they believed they would be able to find a husband with a higher status in society. They would be able to have a husband with a good job who can provide for the family. The husband would therefore be considered suitable and parents would not object. Almost half of participants ‘dropped out of school’ thought they would choose their husband, while for participants who have ‘never been to school’ only a quarter said they would choose. Other relatives included uncles and aunts who would make the decision because they were living with them.



**Figure 6.4: Who makes a decision on marriage partner**

Herself ■ Her Father ■ Her Mother ■ Other Relative ■

(Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2007)

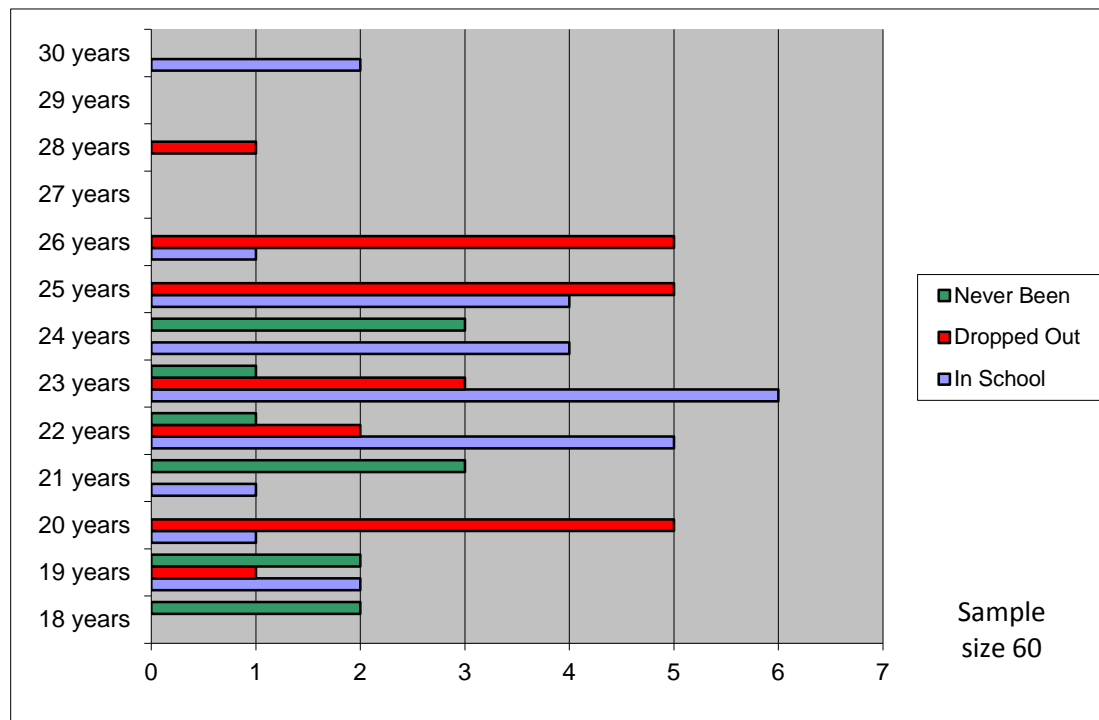
By being able to choose their marriage partner, participants discussed how they hoped this would also translate into them being able to make a decision about when to marry. If they had to find a suitable husband then the timing of marriage could wait. One participant who had 'dropped out of school' narrated how her parents chose a husband for her but the marriage ended in divorce. She knew she was too young to marry at 17 years old but her parents had decided. She narrated how she hoped she would have more of a choice when she married again because the first one was the fault of her parents.

"My parents make the choice about my first marriage but I wanted to when I got married again. They see that man and they think that he is good for me but he was just a pretender. He was not good so we got divorce. I was too young that time to marry, it's not my fault they just don't let me do my own choice" 22-year-old participant 'dropped out of school', married at 17

Figure 6.5 shows the ages participants wanted to marry if they had the choice. As the figure shows participants who had 'never been to school' wanted to get married at earlier ages than those 'in school' and 'dropped out of school'. Education lengthens the period between menarche and marriage as girls are at school when

traditionally they would be married earlier. Participants ‘in school’ wanted to marry later as they wanted a job first. However, there were participants in school who would like to marry straight after their education. Participants ‘dropped out of school’ wanted to marry after they have a job so they are able to support their family. Participants who have ‘never been to school’ wanted to marry at younger ages because they would be expected to, and, like their mothers, have no reason to wait.

**Figure 6.5: The age participants would like to marry**



(Source: Author’s Fieldwork, 2007)

### Childbearing

Some participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ believed that by having a child, a girl would become a woman, even if she had a child outside of marriage. Again, this shows the act of losing virginity is associated with womanhood.

“If you get married and have a child it will make you a woman. When you are married you must have a child so if you have a child you are a woman, even if pregnant early you are a woman” 18-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Although having a child within marriage is socially the only acceptable way, some girls may become pregnant outside of marriage. Four participants ‘dropped out of school’ had a child; three were outside of marriage. Two participants who had



‘never been to school’ had a child, both were pregnant outside of marriage, although one was married after discovering she was pregnant. One participant who had ‘never been to school’ became pregnant at 16 years. She narrated how she was sent to live with her grandmother so as not to bring shame on the family

“I had a baby at 17 but my mum and dad send me to live with my grandmum because they did not want people to know. When I got to my grandmum she told me I should wait until I am married before I have sex but then it was too late so they are trying to find me a husband because it is better that I have a husband” 20-year-old participant ‘never been to school’

Another participant who had ‘dropped out of school’ revealed how she had disappointed her family when she became pregnant. She remembered the many arguments she had with her mother, who also wanted to send her away. Both of these participants feared that their family, because of the social taboo of becoming pregnant outside of marriage, would disown them.

“The time I was pregnant I have problem with my mum. She quarrel with me and said it must be a mistake. If you have pregnant once it will not be twice” 23-year-old participant ‘dropped out of school’

Through cause and effect diagrams, as shown in figure 6.4, participants discussed the consequences of early age pregnancy and pregnancy outside of marriage. Participants ‘in school’ discussed how early pregnancy caused girls to become involved in illegal abortions, to drop-out of school, be disowned by their family, and baby dumping. Participants ‘dropped out of school’ and those ‘never been to school’ narrated how some girls would be forced into marriage, how the man would not help, or would deny responsibility, and this could result in the loss of life of the girl either through complicated pregnancy or through suicide.

### ***Childbearing and education***

Participants ‘in school’ believed their education would have a positive effect on childbearing and childrearing. By being educated they understood the benefits of birth spacing, to have fewer children and improve the health of children. Education can also delay childbearing as girls spend a longer period of time in school.

“When a girl particularly goes to school, [she] come to know more about motherhood, she gets to know what is involved in the life of a girl and to become a woman. Therefore leaving her with a view about the future and with this she gets to know how to handle, take care of her children and family so education is a very good aspect towards becoming a woman” 17-year-old participant ‘in school’

Participants were also aware of the consequences of pregnancy while still in school. All participants ‘in school’ knew that if a girl becomes pregnant while at school she would have to stop her education. The head-teacher at the senior secondary school also revealed that if a girl becomes pregnant she has to leave the school, stating if she wanted to continue her education she would have to go to another school. This is so the young woman is not bullied or teased by her peers. Participants discussed that if a girl becomes pregnant this would result in her sitting at home, unable to continue with her education. This would affect her future as a woman.

“Some girls start following boys they will become pregnant, when they are pregnant they leave school and stay at home and they lose their education sitting at home doing nothing” 15-year-old participant ‘in school’ from focus group discussion

However, there were some participants ‘in school’ and ‘recently left school’ who thought this system was unfair. They were angry that boys would not face the same consequences; while the girl has to stop her education, but if a boy at school is the father, he is allowed to continue his education. Becoming pregnant affects a girls’ education and her future potential prospects, a boy does not face the same challenges.

“Do not have a boyfriend early because [I am] not allowed to do it. My mum does not accept me to have a boyfriend and to get pregnant early, that I am too young to have sex, that it will disturb my education and it is only for married women. If I was a boy sex does no damage to them they can’t get pregnant. They can have sex early and nothing is said to them” 23-year-old participant ‘recently left school’

An interview with APGWA revealed the positive effect education has on early marriage but also revealed how education has a negative effect on early pregnancy. She revealed how particularly in rural areas early pregnancy is increasing because of education. She stated as more girls are being introduced to schooling this has created new challenges. Prior to schooling girls would be restricted to the home and

controlled by parents. The increasing enrolment in rural schools has expanded girls' movements and the interaction with boys and men.

“But times are changing because of education and it is giving positive results in the context of early marriage. There has been change in teenage pregnancy in rural areas. It is increasing because of education. More children become pregnant by teachers in rural areas. Teachers live on site in rural areas some male teachers ask girls to clean their homes this is how more girls are becoming pregnant” interview with APGWA, 2007

It is interesting to note that the interviewee pointed out the urban/ rural divide. This may be due to girls in rural areas being less aware of policies in place to protect them while in school. Rural areas are thought to be more likely to preserve traditions and cultures because they are less modernised. The notion that girls in rural areas are becoming pregnant while at school not only causes contrast with the expected benefits of educating girls but also that it culturally unacceptable for girls to lose their virginity.

## **Conclusion**

Part of growing up and becoming an adult is associated with sexual maturation. Physical, emotional and behavioural changes make the navigation of this transition complex. The act of losing virginity is strongly associated with womanhood status. Most participants stated if a girl loses her virginity she is a woman. However, her social status of being a woman is weakened if she is not married. If a girl has sex outside of marriage she is viewed as a woman, but not a 'real' woman because she has loose morals. Marriage is socially the only acceptable way for a girl to lose her virginity.

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and research from this study illustrates that girls in school have a greater knowledge of sexual health. Education creates new values, beliefs and practices for girls in terms of their sexuality. For example, asking boys to use condoms. Parents believe with issues of sexual health being taught at school, girls are more likely to engage in premarital sex. Mothers in this study narrated how girls are more sexually aware than their own generation. Sexual activity within or outside of marriage can lead to negative reproductive health consequences, for example, unintended pregnancy and STIs. Coerced or unwanted sex is associated with some of these health problems.

Sexual exploitation by either male students, male teachers or sugar daddies created problems for educational achievement. Participants 'in school' frequently expressed stories relating to sugar daddies that they are not only for financial gain but because girls want to experience a Western lifestyle. Male teachers frequently interrupted participants 'in school'. These relationships created two scenarios with both impacting on other transitions. If girls resist to the pressures and agree to a relationship they are rewarded with higher exam marks. Although Biddlecom *et al* (2005), state that although these relationships keep girls in school.

Participants 'in school' were circumcised at younger ages than those who had 'never been to school'. This is because parents feared their educated daughters would refrain from taking part in the practice. Mothers assure young people that 'circumcision' is safe by informing them of the positive effects such as helping in pregnancy and childbirth. Studies revealed that the level of education of the mother also has an effect on whether they will circumcise their daughters. The evidence from this research has explored that this was not the case in The Gambia. Participants 'in school' who had been circumcised said they would circumcise their own daughters. The results have shown that campaigns to eradicate the practice and to reveal the negative health effects have not reached the target population.

The practice has undergone some restructuring to remove the physical act of cutting. The social teaching part of the practice, where girls learn morality, is considered a part of the practice that is worth keeping by NGOs. However, the majority of participants involved in this research remember being taken for 'circumcision' but have not been involved in the social teaching side of the practice. With a change in the practice female 'circumcision' is not seen as an initiation into womanhood, but as it is deeply embedded in culture and traditions the practice is hard to eradicate.

Women are valued for their roles as wives and mothers. The transition to marriage for girls is therefore an expected one. The value of virginity is associated with marriageability. The participants who were married regarded themselves as women because of their marriage status. The competing demands of education and fertility present substantial challenges for young women who seek educational attainment but also feel the social pressures of marriage (Madhavan & Thomas, 2005). Staying in school is one of the best ways to postpone marriage. Attending school and to some extent skills training centres, enables girls to extend the normally

brief period of transition between social status of girl to woman (Lesorogol, 2008). On leaving school girls are encouraged to marry but while at school the majority of girls are encouraged to stay at school as long as possible. As educated girls begin to have a greater choice over their marriage partner, this constitutes a challenge to early and forced marriages. However, this also contributes to viewing education as negative and raises suspicion of educated girls.

Age of marriage also increases with educational level, as shown by the results of this research. The majority of participants who are educated wanted to have a job and stay in education for as long as they could before having a husband. They did want to find a husband soon after work because of the social pressures. In particular, participants who had 'dropped out of school' were strongly committed to prove a higher social status by having a job, to earn money, to show their independence and to prove they do not have to rely on someone else. This challenges the expected gendered roles of women being restricted to the household. Some participants who had 'never been to school' knew that they were expected to marry soon because of their age. Participants who had no education were thought to have reached the time in their life when they were expected to marry into another family.

Soon after marriage women are expected to have children. Bearing children is a measure of a woman's worth and value, however, this is only within marriage. Pregnancy outside of marriage is thought to bring shame on the family and to disgrace the family name. Participants who had children were not ashamed because they had a baby; they simply wanted to prove to society that they were still 'real' women. Participants who had 'dropped out of school' and had a child wanted to prove their social status through independency and economic means. As they had children outside of marriage they were defined as being less of a woman than those who have children within marriage. They therefore wanted to prove their standing in society through a non-traditional route of work and not having to rely on others.

The impact of education on childbearing has long been recognised for its positive effects on reducing fertility levels, improving health care, using family planning, childrearing. While all of these are true, education has created additional problems such as increasing premarital sex, the risk of pregnancy and sexual exploitation. Teenage pregnancy is another obstacle for girls' education. Parents believe risks will be minimised if their daughters stay at home. Issues of virginity,

marriage and childbearing are intrinsically bound together to distinguish social and cultural womanhood status.

## **Chapter Seven**

# **Research Findings and Conclusion**

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### **Achieving the Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of this research was to assess the impact of education on the transitions to adulthood. To achieve this, by focusing on a sub-Saharan African context, the complexity and fluid nature of the numerous transitions to adulthood were explored. These transitions were then subjected to analysis through an educational

lens. Studies have long reflected upon the relative importance of education in sub-Saharan Africa and this thesis contributes to this knowledge. It also contributes to academic literature examining young people's lived experiences in a developing world context.

Firstly, the thesis explored the nature and experiences of childhoods. The majority of childhoods continue to be conceptualised and researched in the developed world (Valentine, 2003). These Western notions and ideals of childhoods are what 'other' childhoods in the developing world are often compared to. Western childhoods are perceived to be experienced through leisure and school without the hardships of work. However, these are far from experiences of childhoods in the developing world, for example, in the Gambian context children are expected to work for the cohesion of their family.

The experiences of childhood will inevitably influence the transitions young people take to reach adult status. Similar to childhood studies, much research on the transitions to adulthood has focused on the Western model, in which schooling is a transition to work and leaving home. Little research has explored the transitions relevant to adulthood in a sub-Saharan African context, particularly with a focus on educational level and womanhood. Studies have usually focused on singular transitions, such as work or marriage and initiation, but few have explored the complex multiple transitions simultaneously (Biddlecom *et al*, 2008).

The participants involved in this research had very different childhoods from those in the West, but are also different from those usually receiving attention, such as child-headed households and orphans. This is not to suggest they are any less important to debates on childhood experiences. Young people usually enter adulthood having experienced differences in duration of schooling. In this research the experience of either going to school, spending some time in school or never going to school affects young people's transitions. Educational attainment also affects the timing and sequencing of transitions.

## **Key Findings**

1. Education has an impact upon some of the aspects of the transitions, such as formal work employment and the age of marriage, but not on others. In particular, social and cultural notions surrounding sexuality override some of the influences of education. The lives of girls and

women in The Gambia are often controlled by the social concept of what it means to be a woman. However, education allows girls and women to challenge their expected gender roles, particularly in relation to work and postponing marriage.

Concepts and experiences of childhood are changing partly because of education (Ansell, 2005). However, not all of these changes are positive and education has presented challenges to the conventional transitions. As in the West, educated young people spend longer periods in a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. This thesis has shown the conflicting arguments between education and social and cultural values and beliefs. This is because education helps girls and women to succeed in previously male dominated arenas, for example, work transitions. Typically, education experts have explored the determinants of various school outcomes without considering the possible implications on other physical and behavioural changes that young people go through on their path to adulthood (Biddlecom *et al*, 2008).

As young women are controlled by the social concept of what it means to be a woman, this contrasts with education from school. There are mixed messages to young people that women must start bearing children at a young age and are expected to within marriage: but that they should stay in school which requires postponing marriage and childbearing. This illustrates that young women have to negotiate a range of conflicting notions of having better future opportunities and what society expects them to do.

Participants 'in school' were expected to pursue economic opportunities that would enable them to break away from the more traditional route of marriage. In theory, girls in senior secondary school should have greater possibilities to support themselves outside of marriage. However, in a country with high unemployment, young women may not be able to take advantage of the skills and knowledge they have learnt. Despite the opportunity for rising female employment opportunities this has not replaced the centrality of women's domestic role and responsibilities and will involve them in an "ever expanding portfolio of maternal obligations" (Bricknell & Chant, 2010: 146). Even if women are able to access the labour market their lives are still centralised around their domestic and reproductive lives within the family.



This research has illustrated that in practice, girls at skills training centres have resources that enable them to succeed in employment better than those with a formal education. Many girls with an education will not be able to use the knowledge they have learnt outside the informal work sector. Although not involved in high sector work, participants at skills training centres believed their employment opportunities were greater than those enrolled in school. These participants who had ‘dropped out of school’ had altered their future livelihood strategies. They now had the opportunity to work to provide for themselves and their family.

Apart from differences between employment opportunities, education also extends the normally brief period between social status of girl and woman, as marriage is postponed. Parents expect their daughters to ‘become somebody’ as they have invested financial contributions to their education. Parents therefore do not want this to be wasted, and will see their daughters success through economic means of supporting the family. This shows some parents are willing to postpone the idea of marriage, particularly if they can reap the benefits from the success of the daughters.

In terms of female ‘circumcision’, education has little influence over the practice. Background literature illustrated that educated mothers are less likely to send their daughters to be circumcised. However, this research has shown that in a Gambian context cultural attitudes remain influential to the continuation of the practice. The initiation associated with ‘circumcision’ has changed over the years, but this has more to do with NGO involvement in restructuring the practice.

2. The value of formal education in terms of knowledge gained, improved capabilities and extended opportunities influence some of the transitions to adulthood. However, education also creates boundaries between the educated and the uneducated, affecting the transitions that these different groups of young people may take. Education can alter the path that young people may take on their paths to adulthood, creating boundaries and making the notion of transitions more complex.

In the Gambian context, where educating girls has become a prominent feature of the government’s promise, the conflicting pressures of society and education are

just starting to be felt. Evidence from this research has revealed some differentiation between the educated and uneducated in terms of knowledge and capabilities for economic achievement and notions of female sexuality and gender roles for reproductive achievement. With educated women developing new beliefs and values which start to clash with social and cultural pressures, young women are torn between a life with increased opportunities but also respecting traditions. Participants discussed how after gaining employment they wanted to help their family as they had helped them by providing them with an education. As Chant (2006) discusses, for some women who are involved in paid work they may redouble their efforts to live up to their expected unselfish ideals to be 'dutiful daughters' or 'good wives'.

Education challenges early and arranged marriages, as shown in this study, as girls want to find their own husband and decide when to marry. However, this corresponds with educational level. Participants 'in school' did not reject the idea of marriage but simply wanted to postpone it until they completed their education and found someone themselves. Education helps girls to negotiate their choice of marriage partner. Participants 'in school' expressed their desire to find themselves a husband; as they were educated they would be able to choose a good husband for themselves. This challenges the social concept of marriage, as normally parents choose their daughters' husbands.

Participants who had 'never been to school' were expected to marry earlier than girls who were educated. This creates boundaries between those educated and those uneducated. Those who have 'never been to school' are limited in the options they can choose for themselves. In terms of marriage, participants stated how parents would choose who they would marry. Participants who had 'never been to school' found they were unable to negotiate with their parents on issues of marriage.

3. To date relatively few educated girls and women have been able to lead lives different from previous generations. Instead young women with some education still have relatively few new options and most of them may end up like those who are uneducated: married, childbearing and looking after a home. The alternative way of life with increased and diverse opportunities remains elusive.

It is unsurprising that there are differences between those who are educated and those who are not. However, the differences that have come from this research reveal that education does not necessarily provide greater opportunities. The majority of participants were still involved in domestic tasks despite their level of education. Even participants who were in senior secondary school, despite their suspension of their domestic roles at the time of the study, were all still competent in domestic roles and responsibilities. This prepares them for their expected gendered roles associated with 'women's work' as they are still expected to marry and have children.

The alternative way of life for women often remains elusive despite their educational level, leaving many women disproportionately affected by poverty. The trend in which women feature disproportionately among the world's poor, has been coined 'the feminisation of poverty' (Chant, 2007). The term 'the feminisation of poverty' has become increasingly criticised as it becomes hard to define and relies too much on income (Chant, 2007). More recently the 'feminisation of poverty' has been used to explore women's disadvantages in respect to poverty, reduced access to education, skills, access to land and property, heavier work burdens, lower earnings, labour market barriers and social and cultural constraints (Chant, 2007). This could apply in The Gambia and this research has shown that women are facing heavier labour demands due to paid employment (either in the formal or informal sector).

Chant has modernised the phrase and uses the term 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation' to illustrate that rising numbers of women of all ages are not only working outside the home but continue to perform the majority of unpaid domestic tasks (Bricknell & Chant, 2010). Despite working outside the home there is an expected female obligation for women to fulfil their familial duties. Many women in The Gambia emphasise that they are working harder inside and outside the home and allow themselves minimal time for rest and relaxation (Chant, 2006).

Participants 'in school' were unaware of the difficulties they would face in an environment with high unemployment levels. It was revealed through interviews that even those with the right skills and knowledge may not be able to take advantage of what they have learnt due to unemployment. Students now need at least a senior secondary school level qualification to have a job they aspired to. With high unemployment rates, many young women are not expected to transfer outside of informal work sector despite their educational achievement. In order to obtain high paid work in the formal sector girls are required to extend their education well

beyond tertiary level, even then they have to compete in a male dominated arena. Chant & Evans (2010) discuss that even when girls' educational achievement is equivalent to their male counterparts' employers discriminate based on gender. Regardless of their education girls and women are disproportionately concentrated in low paid informal work.

Despite girls and women's achievement in education, they are still expected to be defined through the more 'traditional' route of womanhood status via marriage and childbearing. Girls are confined to the social and cultural notions of what is expected from them; this is often more important than having extended opportunities resulting from education. Even if girls are successful through the work sector they are still expected by society to marry, have children and to fulfil their gendered obligations. With or without an education, girls and women are socialised into altruistic behaviour (Bricknell & Chant, 2010). This altruism is often learnt through household situations where girls are raised learning embedded gender routines, cultural values and expected women's behaviour.

### **Methodological Issues**

The situation of the research involved a diverse collection of participants, this made it possible to critically analyse experiences of transitions among young women. The research took place in a number of settings including school, skills training centres and homes. This enabled the researcher to observe and interact with participants in several surroundings. However, this could lead to a potential source of bias, as some participants may be influenced by their setting and not talk about certain situations.

The criterion of education was important to the study. It was decided that differences in educational levels of the participants would contribute to this criteria. There were however, complications of accessing certain types of groups, for example, participants who had 'dropped out of school'. The decision was made to locate participants who had 'dropped out of school' in skills training centres. Participants 'in school' were the most accessible group, despite having to satisfy numerous gatekeepers. Participants who had 'never been to school' were visible in society; but required the use of research assistants/ translators to help gain access to them. Once discussions had been formulated with them, they were keen to be included in the research.

The participants themselves controlled access to mothers. During the second meeting with the participants, the subject was approached concerning narratives with their mothers. This gave participants the power to make decisions concerning their involvement. The process worked well as participants were eager to show the researcher their lives and this deepened the trust between the researcher and the participants.

As with most research, there was a need for flexibility. The research utilised multiple qualitative methods that were child-centred. This is not particularly distinctive, especially when researching children and young people. The emphasis is often placed on designing the methodology which allow participants to express themselves in different ways.

Focus groups proved significant at the start of the research process as the discussions allowed for topics to be raised that the researcher had not previously thought of in relation to transitions. In focus group discussions, participants were able to become vocal and passionate about topics, in particular issues surrounding sexuality, as they were often restricted to talk about such matters. Activities were very different from participants' normal forms of teaching. They were excited by the prospect of taking part in activities that had been designed and organised for them.

Encouraging participants to talk freely during narratives proved one of the difficult components of using a narrative method. Participants were not used to people asking them for their opinions and attitudes and it took them a while to become familiar with the process. In order to facilitate the process the researcher interacted with the participants about their own life. This made the sessions less of a question and answer method to a more conversational approach.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

There are a number of avenues that could be explored to take this research further. In terms of further research in The Gambia, as the country has a multi-ethnic population, further studies could research the similarities and differences in the transitions to womanhood between different ethnicities. This would help to distinguish the role culture plays in the transitions to womanhood.

As womanhood has been concentrated on in this study, data could be collected on boys' transitions to manhood. It is generally accepted that girls and boys paths are thoroughly gendered as they grow up. This could be compared to girlhoods and

womanhoods to find the determinants that influence their transitions. Education could be more influential to certain genders on their path to adulthoods.

The differences of transitions could not only be compared by gender but also through an urban/ rural divide. This would again signify the importance of cultural attitudes and practices. For example, female ‘circumcision’ could play a more important role in rural areas. Education could have a more significant role in urban areas as the majority of further education institutions are only available in the Greater Banjul Region and the Western Region.

In terms of research undertaken in other countries, this study could be made into a long-term period of research. Young people could be selected and be re-interviewed over a selected number of years to gather information on their transitions as they reach them and their experiences of them. This would allow information to be collected on other transitions that are important in other countries.

Data could also be collected from different countries and cultures to explore transitions that are important to them. Transitions could be explored to the relevance they have to other cultures. While other determinants could be examined to see how they impact upon various transitions.

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## Appendix I

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Method	What Involved	Who Involved	Time Taken
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Semi-structured interviews	Topics covered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key policies</li> <li>• Responses to policies</li> <li>• Social practices</li> <li>• Cultural traditions</li> <li>• Education content</li> <li>• Girls education</li> <li>• Girlhood and womanhood</li> <li>• Youth programmes</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Changes in generations</li> <li>• Work opportunities</li> <li>• Domestic roles</li> <li>• Youth sexuality</li> </ul>	12 Key Informants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOSBSE</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> <li>• Women's Bureau</li> <li>• FAWEGAM</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• NWYC</li> <li>• BAFROW</li> <li>• GAMCOTRAP</li> <li>• APGWA</li> </ul>	1-2 hours per interview
		<b>Total Number: 12</b>	

Focus Group Discussions	Discussions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girlhood and womanhood</li> <li>• Perceptions of education</li> <li>• Social and cultural practices</li> <li>• Challenges in society</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Gender roles and expectations</li> </ul>	20 participants at upper basic school  10 participants at senior secondary school	1-2 hours each week for a period of 4 weeks
Visual and task-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timelines</li> <li>• Spider diagrams</li> <li>• Cause and effect diagrams</li> </ul>		
		<b>Total Number: 30</b>	

Narratives	Topics discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood experiences</li> <li>• Gender roles</li> <li>• Work aspirations</li> <li>• Domestic roles</li> <li>• Family expectations</li> <li>• Workloads</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Sexuality</li> <li>• Female circumcision</li> <li>• Girlhood</li> <li>• Womanhood</li> <li>• Marriage</li> <li>• Social and cultural expectations</li> </ul>	11 participants at upper basic school  12 participants at senior secondary school  3 participants recently left school  14 participants dropped out of school at skills training centre 1  8 participants dropped out of school at skills training centre 2	1- 1½ hours each week for a period of 3 weeks
Visual and Task-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24-hour clocks</li> <li>• Timelines</li> </ul>	12 participants never been to school	
		<b>Total Number: 60</b>	

Narratives	Topics discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their childhoods</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Changes over the generations</li> <li>• Educating girls</li> <li>• Women's social roles</li> <li>• Cultural practices</li> <li>• Gender roles</li> <li>• Childhood experiences</li> </ul>	8 mothers of participants in school  4 mothers of participants never been to school	1- 1½ hours
		<b>Total Number: 12</b>	

Total Number of Key Informants: 12

Total Number of Participants in Focus Group Discussions: 30

Total Number of Participants in Narratives: 60

Total Number of Mother Participants in Narratives: 12

## Appendix II

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### **Interview Guide for Key Informants**

- Gender differences in The Gambia and how this affects childhood
- Education – UPE, statistics, policies, strengths, weaknesses, successes, barriers in accessing school and staying in school, curriculum
- Compare formal education with non-formal education
- Skills training centres – achievements, statistics, achievements
- Employment options/ Unemployment statistics
- Opportunities for young people with limited education
- Cultural practices
- Female circumcision – available data, the ceremony, reasons for the practice, differences among ethnic groups and regions, challenging the practice
- Marriage – early/ arranged, reasons, average age, legality, consequences and effects of early marriage
- Awareness raising of early marriage and female circumcision
- Youth problems
- Organisational structure, their aims, objectives, achievements, future plans
- Explore specific programmes for young people with organisations
- Exploring how childhood and youth has changed over time
- National Laws/policies/acts – legal situation for young people and women
- Youth and sexuality – teenage pregnancy
- The effect of education on transitions to adulthood

### **Interview Guide for Participants (In School/ Dropped Out/ Never Been)**

- Problems facing young people
- Childhood experiences and memories
- Gender differences between girl and boys childhoods
- Complete 24 hour clocks
- Roles of girls
- Roles of women
- How the roles of girlhood and womanhood are changing
- Attitudes and experiences of education
- Attitudes and experiences of skills training centres
- Opportunities for those never been to school
- Reasons for dropping out of never attending school
- Future aspirations
- Employment opportunities
- How will they achieve their goals and future aspirations
- Domestic roles and responsibilities
- Participation in and informal work
- Lives of participants not attending school
- Family expectations

- Contributions to the family
- Decision-making within the family in regards to female circumcision, work, education, marriage
- Health and sexuality
- Knowledge of STDs including HIV/AIDS
- Where they learn about sexuality
- Learning the skills and knowledge of becoming a woman
- Marriage- age they would like to marry, decisions regarding marriage, choice of partner
- Childbearing including teenage pregnancy
- Views and attitudes of female circumcision

### **Interview Guide for Mother Participants**

- Explore how their childhoods are similar or different from their daughter's childhood
- Girls and women's roles in the home and in society
- Parental views and attitudes on how the notion of girlhood is changing/adapting
- Attitudes on educating girls
- Marriage – how old, choice of marriage partner, the role of the family
- Own childhood experiences
- Problems facing girls and women across generations
- Views and attitudes towards female circumcision
- Family life and domestic work
- Decision-making in the family
- Expected gender roles
- How girls attain womanhood status
- Explore how womanhood has changed
- Social and cultural dimensions of womanhood